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ANTELOPE ABE, THE BOY GUIDE.

BY OLL COOMES.



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Antelope Abe,

THE BOY GUIDE.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "THE DUMB SPY," "VAGABOND JOE,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FEARFUL LEAP.

THE clear report of a rifle rung out on the still summer air, and rolled, in sharp reverberations, back through the forest hills, followed by a wild wail, whose intonations announced the unmistakable presence of death.

And bark! A yell that seemed to issue, in chorus, from the throats of a hundred demons, peals out again and again, awakening the slumbering echoes of wood and plain, for miles and miles around.

A few minutes later, a youthful horseman, whose face was aglow with inward triumph, shot from the green aisles of the woods, and dashed away over the great prairie at break-neck speed. Still a few seconds later, a score of painted and plumed Indian warriors galloped from the woods on the trail of the youth, and thundered away in pursuit.

"Come on, ye pack o' maw-mouthed imps!" shouted the youth, shaking his clinched fist at the pursuing savages; "come on, and I'll give ye all a free check to brimstone-pit, bearin' the ginuwine stamp of Antelope Abe—jist so!"

The young hunter checked the speed of his animal, turned partly in his saddle, raised his rifle, and fired.

The next instant a riderless pony was running wildly over the plain.

Scarcely had his rifle cracked, when the youth, with a shout of defiance, shot away like an arrow, while, with wild yells of derision and vengeance, the pursuers pressed hard on the trail.

To the youth it was plainly evident that the diminutive ponies of the red-skins were no match in speed for his clean-limbed animal. And so he felt no fear of being overtaken, but determined to draw the savages on until he had slain the last one, if they dared to follow, making up in extra speed the time lost in shooting them.

It was an exciting chase—that score of infuriated Indians, thundering on in pursuit of that fearless, defiant boy, whose name to them was a synonym of terror, and whose scalp in hand would be the warrant of a chief's honors, and the promise of future peace to them.

Scarcely eighteen years had passed over the head of Antelope Abe, and though light of form and lithe of limb, there were few, if any, that exceeded him in point of physical strength.

In his dark-brown eyes, soft and tender as a maiden's in expression, yet keen and quick as a hawk's when danger lurked around, ever reposed the light of a wild and joyous spirit. His nose was slightly aquiline—just enough to add that feature so characteristic of a brave and fearless man. His mouth was expressive of

firmness and decision, and like his eyes, ever wore a smile of boyish merriment and mischief.

He was dressed in the buck-skin garb of a hunter; everything, from the beaded moccasins to the fringed cape about his shoulders, betraying neatness and taste. The collar of his tunic and shirt lay open, showing a strong neck and full, massive chest. His head was bare, having lost his cap during his flight through the woods, and tresses of dark-brown hair were floating on the wind about his head and face. Altogether, Antelope Abe was a youth to be admired, as well as feared, for he was possessed of all the nobler attributes and developments of a "model man," as well as the elements requisite to the successful scout, hunter and guide.

No better marksman, nor horseman on the border than he; and his swiftness on foot, grace and agility of movement, were only to be compared to those of the antelope—hence the sobriquet, Antelope Abe.

The prairie over which he was riding was the extensive plain that stretched its length between the Des Moines and the Checaque rivers. It was slightly undulating, and dotted here and there with small mottes of timber or scrubbery, and diversified with small streams meandering like tiny vines across its green, grassy bosom.

As the youth dashed on, he hastily reloaded his rifle, and then when he had gained the summit of a little knoll, he checked his animal again—turned in his saddle and fired at his pursuers.

Without waiting to learn the effect of his shot, he pressed on, aiming to keep just beyond the range of the inferior rifles with which the savages were armed.

Stung to rage by his repeated death-shots, the red-skins vigorously spurred their ponies forward in hopes of soon ending the chase. But the fugitive only laughed at their efforts as he continued to reload and fire upon them.

In this manner the race continued, and in less than an hour, six riderless ponies were scattered over the plain, while far back upon the trail scores of buzzards were settling down to feast upon the slain, and yet others with their naked coral necks outstretched, hung over the fugitive and watched and waited, alas! for—what?

On went the pursuers and pursued—on beneath the hot noon-tide sun of a mid September day. The ponies of the former were white with foam and beginning to lag, while the beast of the youth showed no signs of exhaustion.

"Wal, wal," Antelope Abe finally ejaculated, "this thing is gittin' to be tiresum—a leetle ole. I'll have to pass in their checks a leetle faster."

This he proceeded to carry out, and in a few minutes two more ponies were riderless. As he now proceeded to reload again he suddenly discovered that he was approaching a small clump of timber which hitherto had been concealed from his view by a swell in the plain. This he would have to pass directly through, or turn either to the right or left. To change his course would give the pursuers some advantage, so he resolved to dash on straight through the motte. And by the time he had reached its outskirts, he had his rifle reloaded, and before entering the woods he decided to fire upon the Indians

again. So he checked his animal and turned in his saddle, but before he could raise his rifle and fire, there was a crashing in the undergrowth before him; at the same instant his animal was jerked back upon his haunches, while he was thrown headlong to the earth, and before he could regain his feet he felt the coils of a lasso fall over his head and shoulders, and pinion his arms helplessly at his sides! while, at every attempt to regain his feet, he was jerked violently to the earth again.

He struggled desperately for freedom, but all in vain. His efforts only served to increase the tightness of the noose around him. He saw his situation in an instant. He was a helpless prisoner in the midst of two score of Indians, into whose very clutches he had ridden!

His situation was critical, but he permitted no word nor look to betray the least sign of fear or surprise; and raising himself to a sitting posture, he exclaimed:

"What the thunder are you red bounds doin' here? If ye want anything o' me, say it; if not, don't make a pack o' fools o' yerselfs."

At this juncture the mounted Indians came up, and it was all the others could do to prevent them from tomahawking the captive on the spot. A ring was formed around him, and, after the fury of his late pursuers had subsided, he was permitted to rise to his feet. He then singled out one of the pursuers, and in a tone of indifference, asked:

"Say, you dandy thar, with the flat nose and dirty face, whar's the rest o' the folks that come out o' the timber with ye?"

He spoke in the Indian dialect, and the savage addressed fairly writhed with rage and fury.

At this juncture the voice of a new-comer was heard approaching. It was a voice speaking English, and which sent a shudder to the young hunter's heart, for he recognized it as that of a desperate white outlaw whom he had every reason to fear.

"Who've ye got hure?" the renegade asked, as he pushed his way through the crowd of savages; then, as his eyes fell upon our hero, bound and helpless, a fearful oath burst from his lips, as he said:

"This are a lucky haul for me, Ingins; that very smooth-faced Antelope Abe is just what I want ter git my claws onto."

"You must fancy yerself a bear, Bodsford," said the captive, with a sarcastic smile.

"Cuss ye, boy! Not one word o' yer sass, ye impedint gal-thief! But, I want ye to tell me one thing, and that is whar that gal is ye stole from our cabin?"

"Don't know ennything about her," replied Abe.

"Ye lie, ye young whelp! and 'less ye tell me, I'll tear ye to pieces!"

The great, burly outlaw looked as though he were fully able to carry out this threat, so far as size, muscular power, and savage character were requisite. But Antelope Abe never moved more than to close one eye, and regard the outlaw with a smile of scorn.

"Boy!" continued Bodsford, "I'll give ye jist two minutes to tell whar ye took that gal to, and if ye don't tell, I'll eat ye up!"

"Ho! ho!" laughed Abe. "ye'll have a big job o' that, for I'm c'd p'se... But then yer jist gassin', Bodsford, fer you're noted for lyin', stealin', and other littie tricks too numerous to mention."

"Ingins!" exclaimed the outlaw, turning to the savages, over whom he exercised no little authority, "form a ring here, an' I'll show ye a new way o' tearin' up a enemy. That boy'll never 'scape here alive! He's done pokin' his nose into everybody's bisnus, an' stealin' gals and shootin' Ingins. Form a ring here! form a ring!"

The savages, now numbering some fifty, formed a ring about the prisoner and outlaw, about fifteen feet in diameter. They stood just on the edge of the prairie, where the ground was smooth and level, and carpeted with a growth of short grass.

The savage ferocity of the outlaw was aroused by the youth's coolness and smiles of contempt, and he thirsted for his destruction. That he had other reasons, however, for disliking the youth, our story will show.

Throwing aside his girdle, and rolling up his sleeves, the outlaw drew a long, murderous-looking knife, and then stood prepared to carry out his work of vengeance.

Antelope Abe mentally acknowledged the outlaw's superior strength, and had not a doubt but that he would execute his terrible threat. Still, he permitted no look to betray his inward fears. Had his arms been free, he might have made some resistance, but, as it was, he was wholly at the mercy of his enemy. However, he was not a little surprised when the outlaw suddenly commanded:

"Release the young thief, Ingins, so that I may show you how inferior the strength of the White Antelope is to Tim Bodsford."

"You've a good opinion o' yerself, Timothy!" said Abe, as the Indian, who held the end of the lasso proceeded to free him of the noose.

Again he stood free, but disarmed.

"Now look sharp, red-skins, and I'll show you how to carve up a white thief," said the outlaw, brandishing his knife above his head.

About twelve feet of ground separated the outlaw and youth. For a moment the two stood glaring at each other—the great, burly outlaw and the slender, beardless youth—the eyes of the one glaring like a panther preparing to spring, the eyes of the other burning with defiance and scorn.

"Now for the White Antelope!" exclaimed Bodsford, drawing himself up and starting slowly toward the youth.

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Abe, at the same time raising his hands—in apparent terror—above his head, as if to protect it, with the open palms toward Bodsford.

"Coward!" hissed the outlaw, but, at the same instant, Antelope Abe's head shot quickly downward toward the earth, and scarcely touching his hands upon the ground, he turned a complete hand-spring with the quickness of a flash, and, as his heels whirled through the air, he planted them, with all the force he could summon, directly in the face of the advancing outlaw, who was sent half-unconscious to the earth.

A savage yell followed his first defeat of the braggart outlaw, who, with the blood streaming from his nose, arose to his feet, cursing and raving.

"Where is the young cuss? where is he?" he fairly yelled, almost blind with his ferocious passion.

"Here I am, Timothy," responded Abe, with a mocking laugh.

The renegade turned and saw the youth at the further side of the ring, half-crouching, as if with fear.

With a furious oath, the enraged human beast shot toward the youth. When he was within two paces of him, the lithe figure of the boy shot upward into the air fully the height of the desperado, and again the feet of the young gymnast were planted full in the face of the outlaw with a force that sent him to the earth again with fearful violence.

Another yell, deafening to the ear, burst from the lips of the savages, for it was a performance of no little pleasure to them; but in the midst of their rejoicing, Antelope Abe made another of his fearful leaps into the air, and kicked a savage fully ten feet from the ring. Through this opening in the circle, the youth shot like an arrow, and the next instant he was sweeping like the wind over the prairie.

It was fully a minute before the astonished savages could realize the turn of affairs, but when they did, they uttered a yell and bounded away in pursuit of the youth, who by this time had got some distance away.

Bodsford regained his feet, not a little confused, and when he saw that his victim had escaped, his fury knew no bounds.

At every stride the fleet-footed fugitive gained upon his pursuers, for in their haste and excitement not one of them had taken the time to mount a pony. But when they saw that the youth was leaving them far behind, they saw their mistake also; and those possessing animals, turned and hurried back to the motte after them.

By the time he had run a mile the fugitive discovered the outlaw, mounted upon his own animal, followed by half a score of mounted Indians, coming on in the pursuit.

There was little chance for the youth now. Nevertheless he determined to put forth every effort to escape, if possible. He knew that if he was retaken, the fury of the outlaw would not be stayed.

All that gave him hope was the appearance of a belt of timber before him, about half a mile away. If he could only reach this, he might dodge them in the undergrowth, but as there was a gradual rise in the prairie all the way to the timber, it would require extra efforts to overcome this obstruction, and so there were little hopes after all.

However, the youth summoned every effort and nerve to the work, and for a few moments he almost held his ground with the mounted pursuers.

But these wonderful exertions of the body could not last long, despite the encouraging fact that the timber was growing nearer and nearer at each bound.

However, he ran on, and finally glanced back

at the pursuers and then forward at the timber. As he did so, a ray of hope gleamed in his eyes, for his present situation convinced him that he could reach the timber, but, while looking forward to select the point where he should enter the sought-for retreat, a cry of despair burst from his lips.

"My God! I am running into the Wolf's Mouth! I had not noticed it before—there is no hope for me now! But, better hurl myself into the abyss, than fall into the savages' power again!"

He ran on, but all hopes of escape had vanished from his breast. The Wolf's Mouth, the object which had so suddenly destroyed these hopes, was a fearful chasm over a mile in length and lying in the shape of a horse-shoe. It was one of those mighty freaks of nature so seldom met with on the great prairies of the Northwest, and always contiguous to some river. It was from thirty to fifty feet in width, and in some places a hundred feet deep. A little stream, that had been busy for ages in cutting this channel through the hill to find a level with the river a mile away, poured its waters through the gorge.

The strip of timber which had given the fugitive such bright hopes, lay on the opposite side of the Wolf's Mouth. And as he was now within the curve of the chasm, he could not turn to either side without encountering the same obstacle. So he ran on, and in a few minutes halted on the brink of the abyss.

He looked back. The pursuers were not over three hundred feet away. He glanced across the chasm and measured its width with his eyes. A cry of despair burst from his lips. It was fully thirty feet from brink to brink.

He glanced down into the black depths below. His head grew dizzy and his heart faint. The bottom of the gorge was lost in depth and darkness, while the sullen murmur of water came faintly up to his ears, and a current of cold air fanned his burning cheeks and throbbing brow.

He suddenly discovered that the opposite side of the chasm was covered with a dense curtain of wild grape vines and parasites that were climbing up from the depths below to meet the glorious sunshine. How they had found root far down in that black rift was a mystery, for they seemed to grow from the face of the solid rocks! But the sight of these vines gave our hero hope; and he exclaimed:

"Oh, if this side is only so, I will try and swing myself down the face of the cliff into the darkness below."

He leaned over the edge of the precipice, and gaz'd down, but started back with a cry. The face of the wall, unlike the other, was barren, smooth and shelving.

"The jig's up with you, Antelope Abe," he said to himself, as the yells of his pursuers grew nearer and nearer; "but why not try it? you were never beat at jumping—why not try it?"

Again he measured the width of the chasm with his eyes, then, stepping backward a few paces, he shot forward again to the edge of the precipice and made a desperate leap for the opposite brink.

But, heavens! he missed it by nearly ten feet,

and with a wild cry, Antelope Abe went whirling down, down into the depths of the Wolf's Mouth.

A few moments later the outlaw and his savages approached the brink where the youth had stood, and gazed down into the chasm. But all was darkness and silence!

CHAPTER II.

THE EMIGRANTS.

"Oh, papa! isn't that beautiful! beautiful!" and the dark eyes of the maiden sparkled with admiration as they swept the great, boundless prairie before her.

Enoch Clarkson's breast swell with inward emotion, to see her so happy, and then he sighed when he thought of the dangers to which she was now exposed.

"Oh! isn't it beautiful, papa!" the maiden repeated, turning her bright, laughing eyes upon the parent regarding her so tenderly.

"Yes, Ida, child; it is beautiful, very beautiful!" the father replied.

The father and daughter were mounted upon fine-looking animals, and had just drawn rein upon the summit of a little swell on the prairie from whence a grand ocean of verdure burst upon the view, rolling away for league upon league into the hazy distance. Before them, but a single object broke the monotonous sameness of that boundless plain. It was a little clump of trees—a mere island in that great sea of verdure, while at its side slumbered a tiny lakelet resembling a silver star in a field of green cloth.

"And there," continued Enoch Clarkson, pointing toward the little grove and lake. "is where our friend Dorlan promised that a guide should meet us."

"Then it is really necessary that we should have a guide, is it, papa?"

"It is, Ida, for we are now in a country where the roads are very difficult to follow, and where dangers from the Indians are eminently great."

"Oh, dear! how I should like to see a wild Indian, papa!" exclaimed Ida; "but, if they are hostile, I don't care anything about it. But I wonder what for a looking fellow our guide will be?—a great big mouth, savage-looking man, I suppose."

The father smiled as he replied:

"It's immaterial, Ida, so that he understands his business; but I believe I will motion the wagons to hurry up," and as he concluded, Enoch Clarkson turned his animal's head eastward and motioned, with uplifted hand, to three white, canvas-covered wagons that were slowly moving toward them.

This told that the father and daughter were two of a party of emigrants that were pushing their way westward over the almost trackless expanse, without guide or compass.

But at the little lake, which was visible from where the father and daughter stood, a friend, who had preceded them to the West, had promised he would send an efficient guide to meet them, and conduct them to the land of promise.

As the wagons approached, the father and

daughter galloped on over the plain toward the lake, which they reached after half an hour's riding.

They found no guide awaiting their arrival at the lake, and when the train came up it was unanimously decided that they go into camp there, and remain until the promised guide came, for already they had felt the want of a guide across those great prairies.

The train was composed of some ten persons belonging to two families, those of Enoch Clarkson and Abram Hammond.

There were four of the Clarksons, father, son and two daughters. And of the Hammonds there were father and mother, and four sons, only one of whom had arrived at man's estate.

The wagons were drawn into the grove, and while some were busy unharnessing the wearied animals and tethering them to grass, others were engaged in pitching tents and otherwise preparing the encampment.

As it was just noon when the camp was arranged the women at once set to work preparing dinner. And while they were thus engaged, the elder Clarkson and Hammond seated themselves to talk over the future, while the boys strolled leisurely through the little grove and around the lake in search of game.

Finally dinner was announced and the little band gathered in. They all sat at one board. Mr. Clarkson returned thanks to the Great Giver, and then all took hold with a keen appetite.

And here let us glance hastily over the little party. Enoch Clarkson and Abram Hammond had been friends from early boyhood. They had grown up together and become men of good standing, morally and financially. Together they had embarked in a speculation that involved their ruin, and now together they were going West to retrieve their fortunes. Theirs was but the old, old story of lost fortunes and flight to the "new country."

Hammond's eldest son was about five-and-twenty, rather prepossessing in appearance and a little conventional in manner. He had received a liberal education in the days of his father's prosperity, had traveled a great deal and so laid claim to a well-stocked mind. But for all this, there was something unfathomable in Fred Hammond.

Roderic Clarkson, Enoch Clarkson's eldest child, was about twenty years of age, with a frank, open countenance, a kind disposition, and a wild, joyous spirit.

Jennie Clarkson was some two years older than Ida, but unlike Ida and Roderic, she was of a more timid and delicate organization—nevertheless very handsome in form and feature.

After dinner had been dispatched, the younger Hammond boys again plunged out into the woods in quest of sport. Indians had not been mentioned since they had gone into camp, so this most important point was being overlooked at the very time that they should really have had guards posted. But this negligence was owing to the want of a knowledge of the crafty foe in whose midst they now were.

Suddenly, however, quite an excitement was raised. One of the boys came running in with

the information that a drove of wild horses was galloping over the plain, not far away.

"You are surely mistaken, John," said Fred Hammond, "for the wild horse is not found so far north as this."

"Yes, it's wild horses," insisted John; "come and see, if you don't believe me."

The men hastily mounted an elevation and glanced out upon the prairie, where, true enough, they beheld about twenty bridleless and riderless horses galloping southward over the plain.

There was something strange about this, for it was well known that this northern country was not the range of the wild horse, and so our friends could scarcely bring themselves to believe that the herd before them was wild, for they appeared somewhat jaded, and sped forward with too much regularity.

Roderic was in favor of going in pursuit of them for the sake of adventure, but the idea was overruled by his friends.

Mr. Clarkson determined to give the horses a closer scrutiny, so he procured his spy-glass and brought it to bear upon them. A cry of surprise burst from his lips as he did so.

"What is it? what is it, Enoch?" asked Abram Hammond.

"I tell you what, boys, we've got to look sharp! There's an Ingin on every one of those horses!"

"Oh! impossible, Enoch."

"Take the glass and look, Abram," said Enoch; "you've heard that Indians are great horsemen, and you'll now see it's the truth. An Indian is lying on the further side of each pony. You can just see his toes hooked over the animal's back—"

"True! true!" burst from Hammond's lips as he took the glass and looked through it at the animals which, by this time, had gained a point directly west of the camp, and about two hundred rods away. "But there!"—the old emigrant suddenly exclaimed—"every toe has disappeared, and see how the horses are beginning to run! I tell you, boys, them Ingins have dropped themselves in the grass there, and let their horses go! We're in danger—imminent danger, and we've got to look sharp, as friend Clarkson says!"

Quite an excitement prevailed. Rifles and pistols were brought out, and everything made ready to receive the savages, in case they made an assault upon the camp. Guards were stationed in the edge of the grove, but the horses were permitted to remain at grass outside, or beyond the guards, as the emigrants entertained no fear of their being stolen or stampeded.

In the use of the rifle Ida Clarkson was excelled by none in that little party, and from the beginning of the excitement she stood like a young heroine, with her rifle in hand ready for the supposed coming attack of the Indians. But when an hour had passed, and nothing further of their danger was seen, she exclaimed, apparently with regret:

"Oh, I'm so disappointed!"

"Why, Ida?" asked her sister Jennie.

"Because," returned Ida, with a roguish laugh, "I thought we were going to have

some fun. How jolly it would be to shoot an Indian!"

"Oh, Ida! how foolish and thoughtless you are!" exclaimed Jenny, reprovingly; "you should not talk so. Danger will come soon enough."

"Why, Jennie, we're pioneer girls now, and we must not be cowardly and timid. We must be brave, and hunt, and fight Indians, and scalp them, too—just like the pioneer girls did in grandma's days."

"Ida—Ida, you reckless little rogue!" said the father gently, for he could not bear to speak harshly to his Ida, his living Ida, who grew every day to look more like his wife—his dead Ida.

Every one in the party loved Ida. They could not help it. She was so wild and full of sunshine and merriment that her smiles and rippling laughter kept sorrow and sadness from every heart.

As nothing more of the Indians was seen, the emigrants came to the conclusion that there were no Indians, at all, about. However, they did not permit their vigilance to relax.

The day wore slowly away; still it wanted about two hours of sunset when Jennie and Ida strolled leisurely through the little grove down by the edge of the lake. Ida's tongue ran incessantly, and she seemed ever on the eve of bounding away, like a young colt, over the prairie. Jennie tried hard to convince her that she must mend her ways, subdue her wild and romping spirit, or she would never be considered a woman; but the more Jennie talked, the more she became convinced that her task was a hopeless one. It was Ida's nature to be light-hearted and wild, and, in this case, it was simply impossible for nature to be thwarted.

"Oh, what a pretty little lake!" she exclaimed, as they paused upon the shore and gazed over the still, glimmering waters.

"Yes, it is very beautiful," responded Jennie.

"How I would like to take a boat-ride upon it! I wonder what the name of it is?"

"I have never heard it mentioned, if it has a name at all," replied Jennie.

"Well, then, I'll name it Silver Basin," said Ida, and in speaking of it afterward, called it the Silver Basin. It passed from lip to lip, and for years afterward that lakelet was known by the name of Silver Basin.

This small body of water did not exceed half a mile in diameter, and not over twenty rods of its shore was skirted by the little grove. Its surface lay but a few feet below the general level of the prairie, and its low banks, absorbing moisture continually, had produced a dense growth of rank grass which, skirting the water, suggested the rim of a basin, and from which Ida probably took the idea of the Silver Basin.

The sisters wandered slowly along the shore, stopping now and then to pluck a wild-rose or a water-lily that grew at the water's brink, and watch the lightning-like flashes of the fish, as they turned their silvery sides to the sun and gamboled through the clear waters.

Finally, the maidens came to where an uprooted tree projected from the bank out over the water, and with a cry of girlish joy, Ida sprung upon the log and walked out over the lake's bo-

som as far as possible. Jennie could see no danger nor impropriety in this, so she followed Ida's example, and, in a moment more, the sisters were seated on the log, gazing down into the limpid water, whose surface was almost within reach.

They could see the bottom of the lake, covered with aquatic plants, and beautiful moss, whose variegated hues contrasted with a harmonious blending of colors. Troops of fish sported through the water, going and coming like patches of sunlight before their eyes.

The sisters sat and watched these finny sports until they grew tired; then Ida turned to Jennie and asked:

"I wonder how long we'll have to remain here, Jennie?"

"Until the guide comes that Mr. Dorlan promised to send to meet us here," replied Jennie.

"Oh, I reckon the guide will be a big, bushy-faced fellow, with dirty buckskin clothes, a hooked nose and gray eyes, just like they say all guides are."

"Why, how do you want him to look?" asked Jennie.

"Young, handsome, jolly, and full of life; with black eyes and—"

"Then you will fall in love with him," laughed Jennie, as she mechanically leaned forward and gazed out upon the water a few feet before her; but, at the same instant, she uttered a low cry of surprise, and started back.

"What is it, Jennie?" asked Ida.

"Look there, upon the water!" cried Jennie, pointing out before her.

Ida looked in the direction indicated, and there, upon the surface of the water, they beheld a dusky human face floating toward the shore! In the water below she could see the half-naked form of an Indian, propelling himself forward by motion of his feet.

At first, Ida supposed it was a dead savage floating there, but when she saw those motions down in the limpid water, and saw his black, gleaming eyes fixed upon hers, she knew that it was a living Indian.

"Oh, Jennie," whispered Ida, "it's a living Indian! Scream, quick, Jennie—quick!"

Jennie screamed; but scarcely had she done so when the Indian arose from the water, and leaping upon the shore, turned and confronted the girls!

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF THE WOLF'S MOUTH.

LATE in the night, when the sky was still moonless, and drifting clouds concealed the stars, voices—hollow and ghost-like voices—might have been heard issuing from the black depths of the Wolf's Mouth. And had one been standing on the edge of the precipice, whence Antelope Abe made that fearful leap, and gazing downward, he would have seen a score of torches moving about, seeming like the mere glow of a fire-fly, away down at the bottom of that damp and dismal abyss. And, looking closer, he would have no difficulty in recognizing the bearers of the torches to be Indians.

But what were they doing there? Were they searching among the blackened logs and jagged

rocks for the lifeless, mangled body of Antelope Abe? If so, their search will be in vain; for, fifty feet above their heads, on a cliff jutting out from the face of the great wall, and concealed by creeping vines, sat our hero, Antelope Abe, watching, with inward triumph, every move that they made.

That this youth had escaped the awful death which the savages had reason to believe he never could escape, was a miracle, in the broadest sense of the word. He could scarcely convince himself that he had escaped being crushed in the bottom of the pit. Nevertheless, it was true; our hero still lived, and to his wonderful activity and great presence of mind, his life was owing.

When he made the leap, and saw he could not reach the opposite brink, and found himself whirling downward into the abyss, he thrust his legs suddenly outward, and fortunately caught his feet in a trailing vine. The vine broke, but jerked him in toward the cliff so close that he was able to grasp the vines that clambered so thickly up the face of the rock; and, although they gradually gave way under his weight, his downward flight was checked so that he was enabled to grasp other vines, and by repeating this a number of times, he finally checked himself entirely, and clung to a large vine, half-way down the face of the wall, and within reach of a wide jutting crag, upon which he instantly swung himself, behind the vines, and was saved! But his hands were lacerated and bleeding from the effects of the rough vines tearing through his grasp.

He had scarcely made this miraculous escape when he saw Bodsford and the Indians appear on the cliff above; and for a moment his heart ceased to beat, lest the keen eyes of the savages should penetrate his flimsy screen, or see the torn vines and detect his manner of escape. But while all was plainly visible to him above, the darkness that thickened as the abyss grew deeper, concealed the torn vines from his enemies' view.

Here he would be compelled to remain, he knew not how long—until night at least; and even then he had little hopes of effecting his escape. For he could not ascend, and to swing himself down the vines into the gulf below, he knew not what fate might await there. This, however, he resolved to do when darkness had closed the mouth of the rift above him.

But no sooner had his hour for action come, than he discovered a number of savages carrying torches, coming up the gorge, far below. He knew at once they were coming to search for his supposed mangled body, and from his covert he watched them in silent triumph. For fully an hour they searched among the logs and debris that had gathered in the gorge. They spoke with great wonder and surprise at not finding the body. The search, however, proved quite fortunate to Antelope Abe, for by the glare of their torches he was enabled to see that no vines grew nearer than thirty feet of the bottom of the abyss. All possibility of escape, therefore, downward, was cut off.

After the savages had given up the search, and had gone away, the young hunter set to work to devise some plan to escape, but, while

thus pondering, he heard voices on the cliff above him.

What next were the savages going to do? He waited and was suddenly startled by seeing that it was growing lighter in the chasm overhead. The cause of this was soon made manifest, when a glowing torch, attached to a rope, was suddenly swung down the cliff within a few inches of his face.

He drew quickly back as far as possible, and listened, and was not a little startled when he heard an exclamation burst from the lips of a savage who was standing on the opposite side of the chasm. He had discovered the torn vines and communicated the fact to his friends on the other side. Abe heard his words, and understood them without difficulty.

The torch was lowered, and raised, and swung along the cliff a number of times, then was drawn up. This convinced Abe that he had not been discovered.

Another silence ensued, which lasted several minutes. Then followed a general wrangling and excitement overhead; then Antelope Abe put his head through the green screen and looked up. To his horror he discovered that a savage was being lowered down the face of the cliff, directly in line with the point where he was concealed. He could hear his body scraping against the vines, and he could see the savage holding to the rope by which he was being lowered, while with his feet he was feeling the face of the cliff under the vines for any recess, projection, or niche, in which a person might conceal himself. He carried no torch, which fact afforded the boy great relief.

The daring red-skin was lowered quite slowly, but at last his feet touched upon the projecting crag whereon Abe was concealed. He then shouted for those above to hold the rope still, and, balancing himself upon the crag, he let go the rope's end and turned to explore the place whereon he stood. While Abe's eyes had become accustomed to the gloom of the place, it was blinding darkness to the savage, and while he stood waiting for it to grow lighter, Antelope Abe, with the quickness of a flash, and the clutch of a giant, seized him by the throat and hurled his head against the rock with such terrific force that the savage sank unconscious at his feet—not a sound having escaped his lips.

Young Abe now resolved upon making a desperate and dangerous stroke for his escape. To this end he removed the Indian's leggins and moccasins, and put them on himself, over his own. He then removed the feathered head-dress and adjusted it upon his own head. Next, he tore a number of small vines from the face of the cliff, and having tangled them carefully together, he threw them over his head in such a manner as to conceal his face entirely, and to trail down over his shoulders and breast so as to conceal all of his body except that portion clad in the Indian's leggins and moccasins. These vines were so arranged as to have the appearance of having caught over his head while being hauled up the cliff.

His disguise completed, he reached out and grasped the knotted end of the rope, and then said, in the Indian dialect, trusting to the dis-

tance to hide all imperfections in the voice, which translated was:

"Haul up—White Antelope is not here; arms giving out."

He instantly felt the rope drawn taut, and the next instant he was dangling between Heaven and the Wolf's Mouth, but rising up, up along the face of the cliff—up into the glow of a fire that burned on the edge of the precipice and revealed to him two-score of savages.

As his head appeared tangled and matted over with vines, the savages burst into a roar of laughter, but a moment later his knees touched upon the top of the cliff, and then, with a quick bound, he gained his footing and let go the rope.

Once more he stood in the free air of Heaven, but no time was to be lost, for his covering of vines attracted much attention, as well as created much amusement.

In his feigned attempt to tear the vines away, he gazed about him, and just on the opposite side of the camp-fire, leaning against a tree, was his own trusty rifle, with pouch and horn hung over the muzzle, that these same Indians had taken from him that day.

He walked boldly around the fire—took up the rifle and accoutrements then tossed aside his clever vail of vines, and with a triumphant laugh, bounded away into the darkness of the woods.

For a moment the savages stood and gazed at each other in mute wonder—completely dumfounded, horror-stricken and terrified. But the truth once fully comprehended, like so many enraged demons, they shot away in the pursuit. But as well might they have pursued the antelope, for Abe now had a clear field before him and the advantage of the darkness around him.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he laughed, when clear of the enemy; "that was a clever trick I played on the Ingin in the Wolf's Mouth. Well, well; and there is my friend, Timothy Bodsford—I hope he won't eat his own head off. Let's see, he warn't among the Ingins when I war escorted up from below, and I'll bet he's at some deviltry. If he and his tribe hears o' them immigrants, they'll pounce onto 'em, but if nothin' goes wrong, I'll git to the lake by mornin'. Keen-knife is thar by this time, I hope."

The youth pressed rapidly forward, and soon emerged from the timber into the open prairie. He now stopped to note his position from a geographical standpoint, and shaped his course accordingly; which was southeast across the great prairie.

He moved rapidly onward, with renewed strength and buoyant spirits. And, although the night was exceedingly dark, he was so well acquainted with the topography of the country, that he experienced no trouble in keeping his course.

His mission over that prairie was one of great importance, and the loss of his horse and detention by the Indians had proven a sore mishap to him; nevertheless, he determined to make up the time already lost by renewed exertions on foot.

He had traveled some distance over the prairie, along an old Indian trail, and was just congratulating himself on being free from Indian troubles, when the sound of hoofs fell upon his

ears. He had barely time to throw himself into the tall grass, at the side of the trail, when a score of mounted savages, one behind the other, filed past him at a brisk gallop.

They did not see him, and after they were some distance away, he raised his head above the grass and listened.

At this juncture a solitary Indian, who was lagging behind the others, galloped past him. Abe dropped his head quickly, but the animal must have heard him, for it shied to one side, and gave a loud snort.

This aroused the Indian's suspicions. He shouted to his companions, but they either did not hear him or heed him, and rode on. The Indian, however, being like all Indians—of an inquisitive nature—resolved to know the cause of his animal's affright, and turning, he rode back near where the fugitive lay in the tall grass.

The animal was a spirited and mettlesome one, and its keen instinct soon detected the presence of the form in the grass, and again he became frightened and sheered away; still his rider could not tell the cause; and so, at last, he dismounted, and taking the animal by the bits, with one hand, and his tomahawk in the other, he again advanced toward the spot.

Antelope Abe could just see the outlines of the Indian and his horse, while his own prostrate position blended his form with the grass. He could easily have shot the savage, at the risk, however, of the report of the rifle bringing other danger down upon him. But a happier idea than that of slaying the Indian suddenly entered the mind of the daring Boy Guide.

Having removed the leggings, moccasins and head-dress, that he had taken from the Indian in the Wolf's Mouth, from his person, the youth laid them in the grass and then dragged himself away. About a rod from the discarded articles he paused and watched the Indian's movements.

The red-skin moved suspiciously forward, inspecting every little mound and tussock of grass with the edge of his tomahawk, his horse, in the mean time, keeping up an uneasy treading and fretful sniffing, which increased as they approached the deserted leggings and moccasins.

At last the savage's eyes fell upon the dark objects lying in the grass, and, with a low cry, he reached forward to pick up the clothes.

At this juncture, Antelope Abe glided up to the side of the animal—which was now between himself and the Indian—and with the quickness of thought vaulted into the saddle.

This frightened the beast, which, plunging forward, jerked the savage over, and breaking loose from him, it shot away over the prairie at a furious speed, with Antelope Abe seated firmly and triumphantly astride of its back.

"Ha! ha! ho! ho!" laughed the fearless boy, as he turned the animal's head in a southeast course; "'eye fur eye, tooth fur tooth,' says the Holy Book, is a fair shake, and it means hoss fur hoss, jist as well. And Abraham Smollet, my boy, you'll soon make the lake, now. Git up, T'ger!"

For two hours the animal fairly flew over the plains with unfailing speed; but, at last, a cry of surprise burst from the rider's lips, and he drew rein upon the summit of a little swell and

gazed away before him, where, at a distance of about a mile, he saw a dull light glimmering vague-like through the trees.

"By the royal tigers!" he exclaimed, "that light is at the lake! The imigrants are there, and I'll be there, too, purty soon. On, Tiger—on!"

Again he dashed away, and, as he proceeded onward, he kept his eyes fixed upon that dull light, which, strange to say did not grow brighter as he advanced, but seemed to be changing into a grotesque shape. And there was something strange about it, for it seemed to be elevated in the air—too high, entirely, for a camp-fire.

He rode on, and shortly a swell before him hid the light from his view, but, he soon gained the summit of the knoll, and he drew up so suddenly on the reins that the animal was thrown back, almost on its haunches.

And why?

That light which had so attracted his attention had assumed the shape of a *human hand*, all the fingers of which were, apparently, closed upon the palm, excepting the index finger, which was pointing southward.

It was about three hundred yards away, and was of the size of a giant's hand, and it must have been a giant, indeed, to have held that hand so high.

But what did it mean? What was it more than a hand of fire? Was it the agent of human hands, or an atmospheric phenomenon?

These were the questions that Antelope Abe asked himself, and puzzled his brain over for several minutes. At last, he glanced in the direction indicated by the glowing finger, but he saw nothing. When he again looked ahead of him, the hand of fire was gone!

There was a deep and unfathomable mystery in all this—a mystery that impressed Antelope Abe strangely. He was not superstitious as most bordermen are, and so he decided to ride on and make some investigations, but, at this juncture, he caught a glimpse of a number of horsemen riding slowly along a high ridge to his right.

They were not over two hundred yards away, and from their outlines, dimly seen, he saw they were Indians.

To elude detection, he knew it would require extreme caution and silence, and to prevent his horse from making a noise he dismounted, and was in the act of placing his hand over the animal's nostrils, when it reared its head and uttered a shrill neigh.

The mounted savages heard it, and the next instant they were sweeping down upon the boy-guide at a breakneck speed.

CHAPTER IV.

KEEN-KNIFE.

IDA and Jennie Clarkson arose to their feet, and running along the log sprung to the ground. They would instantly have fled to the camp, but the Indian calmly folded his arms across his breast, and stood directly in their path.

Jennie's screams had not been heard at the camp, so they were entirely at the mercy of the Indian, who, seeing the girls' affright, smiled blandly, and said, in broken English:

"No need fear Ingin? Me Keen-knife—friend to whites."

The maidens' hearts beat easier, yet they doubted his words, for they had heard that the Indians were treacherous, and so Ida said:

"And why don't you let us pass, if you're a friend?"

"Didn't know you wanted to pass," said the Indian, stepping quickly to one side.

The girls walked briskly forward until they had passed him, then they started away as fast as they could run, while the Indian turned and followed them.

"Oh, papa!" exclaimed Ida, as she rushed into camp, "here comes a wild Indian!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Enoch Clarkson, seizing his rifle and turning toward the advancing savage; "halt there! Indian, what do you want here?"

"Come to meet young hunter. Me Keen-knife—me friendly Ingin," replied the Indian, maintaining a calm and unflinching composure.

The attention of the emigrants was now drawn toward this Indian. He was quite young—possibly not over eighteen years of age—was of a lithe figure, but handsomely developed in muscular and physical proportions. He was naked to the waist, and his dripping leggins and loin-cloth at once suggested to the elder Clarkson the question:

"What have you been doing in the lake?"

Before the Indian could answer, Ida quickly spoke for him, and told her father where they had first discovered him.

"And," said Mr. Clarkson to the Indian, "why did you take to the lake to get into our camp?"

"Could git in no udder way. Bad Ingins all 'round on prairie waitin' for night to come to kill pale-face."

"What!" exclaimed Clarkson, "do you mean to say that we're surrounded by hostile Indians?"

"Yes," replied the red-skin youth.

"Indian, what assurance have we got that you're not a traitor, and are lying to us?" asked Clarkson.

"None but own word. If don't believe that, tie me up till Boy Guide comes. He come soon. But mus' be careful, or bad Ingins kill and scalp all."

There was something so impressive, so honest and truth-sounding in the young red-skin's words, that every one was induced to believe him. And so he was at once taken into the confidence of our friends, and put through a rigorous cross-examination, which left no doubt but that he was a friendly Indian, and that his motives in coming there as he did were good. But his report of their being surrounded by hostile Indians was fearful news, and threw them into a deep quandary as to the course they should pursue to guard against a surprise. At last, Mr. Hammond turned to the Indian and said:

"Then, if you are a friend to us, can't you tell us how to guard against the bad Indians?"

"Yes," responded the youth promptly; "cut down trees and build big wigwam, quick! Bad Ingins do notbin' till night—mebbe not then, if find you well fixed."

This was good advice, and the emigrants de-

cided to act upon it at once. So the men and boys not on guard got out their axes and went vigorously to work, felling such trees in the little grove as could be easily handled; and it was not long until the foundation of the proposed defense was laid.

The friendly Indian assisted them now and then in laying up a heavy log, but most of the time he busied himself in strolling, cat-like, through the grove and camp, and more than once Enoch Clarkson caught his black eyes fixed with admiring glances upon Ida and Jennie.

These actions aroused a spark of mistrust in Clarkson's breast, and, although he said nothing to his friends, he kept a close watch upon the Indian's movements, and so there was scarcely a moment but what some of the emigrants' eyes were upon him. But in spite of all this vigilance, it was suddenly discovered that the Indian was gone!

This incident created general excitement. No one had seen him leave, yet every one had seen him standing "right there a second ago." They tried to track him and failed; they searched the grove, the wagons, tents, and, in fact, everything and place within a hundred yards, but found no trace of him.

"Betrayed, friend Clarkson! betrayed!" exclaimed the elder Hammond: "I was afraid of it, all the time."

"And so was I," replied Clarkson; "and I thought I was watching him so close that he could not possibly get away unseen."

"Well, I reckon your looks evaporated him," laughed Roderic Clarkson. "What do you think, little sister Ida?"

"I don't believe Keen-knife, as he called himself, is a traitor. He looked too honest," returned Ida.

"Oh, child, child," said the father, "you do not know what treachery an Indian is capable of, and I am afraid his remembrance of your young face will lead him to slay us all to capture you."

"Oh, dear! he needn't go to that trouble," said Ida, laughing, "for, rather than see you all killed, I'd give myself up to him, for I'm sure he's good-looking."

"Talk of an Indian being good-looking! Ida! Ida!"

"Papa, you do Keen-knife injustice. I am sure he was not sneaking, and then he gave you good advice."

"That's you, Ida, out and out. Believing in everything that's new to your eyes. But, we'll see about Keen-knife. John, go tell the guards to keep a sharp lookout for the young traitor. There's no telling now, what minute he'll be down upon us with a whole pack of his friends."

The men resumed their work on the defense already begun, and soon had it completed. It was not a block-house by any means, but simply an inclosure about fourteen feet square by six in height. It was open at the top, and on the outside green brush and boughs were cut and piled against it, so that it would be quite difficult for an enemy to approach the walls. It was hastily constructed and lacked a great deal of being complete, but would serve a good purpose in case of an attack.

The horses were now brought in and tied up. Supper was prepared and eaten and arrangements made for the night. Roderic Clarkson, Fred and John Hammond were selected, or rather volunteered to stand guard the first half of the night.

A general change was made in the location of the wagons, tents, and so forth, so that if Keen-knife should come back in the night to steal and massacre, he would not find things as he had last seen them, and thereby be defeated, perhaps.

The early twilight began to gather in the grove, while it still was light on the prairie, where objects could be seen for miles. A deep silence reigned in the encampment, and the spirits of the emigrants grew gloomier as darkness approached, and their uneasiness and forebodings were all traceable to the appearance and disappearance of the Indian youth, Keen-knife.

Suddenly, however, this silent fear was aroused to active excitement. A horseman had been discovered approaching, at a rapid pace, pursued by a number of mounted Indians, who were yelling like fiends. The fugitive was coming from the west, and with one accord the emigrants decided that it was the looked-for guide.

Every man seized his rifle ready to receive the Indians, but to their happy disappointment, the savages turned back—gave up the pursuit, before they had got within rifle-range of the grove.

The fugitive came on, entered the grove, and rode into the encampment.

To the emigrants' surprise, he proved to be another Indian; and, as he drew rein, he exclaimed:

"Ho!"

He was a large, fierce-looking fellow, with long scalp-lock, small black eyes, and large, repulsive mouth. He was armed to the teeth, and bestrode a spirited, strong-limbed animal.

"Well, who are you?" asked Enoch Clarkson.

"Me friendly Ingin—me Wild Deer," replied the savage.

"Oh, the devil! there it is again!" exclaimed Roderic Clarkson; "more friends; it seems that the Indians are all friends to us, and yet traitors."

"Waugh!" ejaculated the Indian. "Me no traitor, me good Ingin friend to guide that come to meet you here soon."

"Suffering Moses! the same old story. All friends to that guide," returned Roderic, nudging Fred Hammond. "He's an unfortunate fellow to have so many friends."

"Bad Ingins chase Wild Deer," continued the savage. "Have big race."

"So we saw; but where is that guide you say is coming to meet us?"

"Don't know. He come soon. Told Wild Deer meet him here at lake."

"Well," said Enoch Clarkson, "we've been deceived by one Indian to-day, and we don't know whether to believe you are friendly, and telling the truth, or not."

"Ugh! me am friend. Me know your name mebby."

"Well, what is it?"

"Hammond—Clarkson," replied the Indian, with a grim smile; "white settler, Dorlan, send guide to meet you—me friend to guide."

"That sounds something like it, Enoch," said Abram Hammond. "That proves this Indian is all right."

"Yes, his being chased by the 'bad' Indians proves that he is not *their* friend," replied Enoch.

"Maybe they just chased him into our camp to tell a pack of lies," said Roderic, in an undertone.

"Well, Wild Deer, dismount, won't you?" asked Abram.

The Indian did not hear him, or else he did not understand the request, and said:

"Yes, pale-faces in much danger."

"Is that true?" ejaculated Clarkson; "are the Indians around and about us?"

"Yes. Look! see them now—there!" and he pointed westward.

Every eye was turned in the direction indicated, and, at this juncture, the savage spurred his horse toward Ida—who had mounted a camp-stool and was looking westward, also—and, leaning over on his animal, he threw his arm around her waist—lifted her to his animal's back before him, and then, with a yell of cunning triumph, dashed away.

Ida screamed wildly for help. The emigrants turned quickly to see what was the matter, and were stricken speechless by what they saw. But, even as their eyes fell upon the treacherous red-skin flying away with the idol of their hearts—plucked from their very midst—the clear report of a rifle rung sharply out in the grove behind them, and, at the same instant, a cry of mortal agony pealed from the lips of the traitorous savage abductor; he was seen to reel upon his horse, then, with his fair burden, rolled lifeless to the earth, while the now riderless pony galloped wildly away over the plain.

Enoch Clarkson rushed excitedly to the assistance of his darling, while the others turned to see who it was that had fired the lucky shot.

To their surprise they saw the lithe figure of an Indian glide from behind a clump of bushes and advance toward them, with the white smoke still curling from the muzzle of the rifle which he bore. A beautiful spotted jaguar-skin was thrown around his shoulders and a white plume ornamented his head. And, judge of our friends' still greater surprise, when they discovered, as the red-skin approached, that it was the wrongfully mistrusted young Indian, Keen-knife.

CHAPTER V. THE GUIDE AT LAST.

By the time that Enoch Clarkson reached the fallen savage, Ida was upon her feet, gazing around her in great excitement and confusion. And when she saw her father approaching, she uttered a cry of joy, and, running to meet him, she threw herself into his arms and wept with mingled affright and joy.

The fall had not injured her, but she was greatly terrified, and it was some time before she recovered her usual composure.

Mr. Clarkson conducted her back to the camp, and when he had learned who it was that fired

the shot which saved her from captivity, he seized the young Indian by the hand and poured thanks and blessings upon him. He felt angry at himself for having mistrusted the youth, who informed him that he had left the camp simply to obtain his rifle and jaguar-skin that he had left around the lake, when he had taken to the water to reach the camp unobserved.

The body of the fallen savage was interred where it lay, and it now became a great wonder to the party how the red-skin had learned their names, and knew that Dorian had promised to send a guide to meet them. In fact there was a mystery about it which they could not unravel.

The guards were now posted for the first watch, which was to last till midnight. Roderic Clarkson took what was considered the most exposed point. Keen-knife was to act as scout, his field of duty being confined to no particular point, and since he had so cleverly defeated Wild Deer, and had displayed, without ostentation, his own knowledge of Indian trickery and woodcraft, the emigrants felt greatly relieved of the burden of fear that had been imposed upon them.

The night fell, dark and gloomy. The moon would not be up before midnight, and the starlight was hidden by dark clouds that were drifting across the sky.

The beat of the three guards was divided into three sections, which, together, constituted the circuit of the encampment. They kept just within the edge of the grove, and had it so arranged that two of them would meet at intervals on the end of their beats.

The night wore slowly on without the sign of an Indian to be seen. But presently the attention of Roderic Clarkson was attracted by a dull red light on the plain, a few hundred yards west of him. He stopped and gazed steadily at it, and was not a little surprised when he saw that light gradually assume the shape of a *human hand*, with the index finger pointing to the south. It was elevated several feet above the plain, and seemed to be floating upon the air.

What did it mean? What was it? Roderic became greatly puzzled as to the nature of it, and would have called counsel in the matter, had the strange, mysterious hand not disappeared as suddenly as it came.

He moved on until he met Fred Hammond, and then asked:

"Fred, did you see that hand of fire out yonder, just now?"

"No, of course I didn't. You're joking now for the sake of excitement," was Fred's response.

"True as gospel, Fred. I saw a large hand of fire, with one finger pointing southward. It seemed to be floating on the air. I tell you it's strange!"

"Some atmospheric phenomenon," replied Fred, "or else some signal of the Indians preparing to attack us. Let us not tarry, Roderic."

The two turned about and moved away on their beats.

Another hour passed. The sky cleared off, and the moon finally arose, flooding with its soft, mellow light, the great ocean of verdure that melted into the distance like the vision of a dream.

Objects of the size of a person could be seen for half a mile away. Our friends felt jubilant over this, for while they were protected by the shadows of the grove, they could command a fair view of the plain around them.

Roderic was moving back toward the point where he usually met Fred Hammond, when he was suddenly startled by seeing an object moving, or rather floating over the grass directly toward the grove. A careful glance showed him that it was the figure of a woman, clad in dark garments, excepting the crimson shawl that was thrown hoodlike over her shoulders.

There was something very singular in this. Surely it could not be Ida nor Jennie, and what woman would dare be abroad on the great prairie at that hour of the night?

He watched her closely as she approached the grove.

"Halt!"

"It was Fred whom Roderic heard utter this quick command, and, as the woman stopped, he saw the form of Fred emerge from the shadows of the grove into the moonlight, and confront her.

"Who are you?" he heard Fred ask.

The woman threw back her shawl upon her shoulders, and as she lifted her eyes to those of young Hammond, Roderic heard him exclaim: "Great God!"

And as the words fell from his lips, he staggered backward, turned and fled into the grove as if from a phantom.

"What in the name of heaven does that mean?" Roderic asked himself, as, moving forward, he stepped from the grove and confronted the woman, who still stood as motionless as though she were an inanimate object.

As his eyes fell upon her face Roderic fairly staggered. She was a young woman barely twenty years of age, with a small, lithe figure, and features that were decidedly lovely, yet childlike in their simplicity. Her eyes were large, black and lustrous—mild and innocent in expression. Ripples of luxuriant, dark-brown hair flowed over her beautifully-rounded shoulders, almost to her waist. Her features were delicate yet bronzed by exposure to the winds, and, as he gazed upon them, he saw that she was pale as a corpse and terribly agitated, but she recovered her composure by the time Roderic had gained his, and gave expression to his thoughts in the exclamation:

"A prairie nymph!"

The maiden smiled sadly, but in a voice that sounded musical to the ears of Roderic Clarkson, she said:

"You are mistaken, sir; I am but a woman."

"But who are you? and why are you here, alone and unprotected, on this great prairie, that is alive with Indians?"

"I am a pioneer girl," she replied, "and am used to its dangers. I know the Indians are about, and that is why I am here—to warn Enoch Clarkson and Abram Hammond that their families are in imminent danger!"

"A guardian angel!" exclaimed Roderic, "or how would you know who was encamped here?"

"I learned it through those who would destroy them, and carry the daughters of Clarkson into captivity."

"Thank God for this warning! Come with me to camp; you must not go back alone from here to-night."

"No; I cannot go to your camp," she replied; "I must away, or my life will pay for this night's adventure. Be warned, and guard well your camp, is my farewell advice."

"Stay! stay! fair maiden! Tell me to whom I am indebted for this warning, and if we shall—shall ever meet again?"

"Call me Myrtle, if we should ever meet again," she replied, then turning, glided away.

"Gone!" exclaimed Roderic, like one starting up from a dream, "gone, and taken my heart with her! Oh, Myrtle! Myrtle! I must—I will meet you again if I have to travel the world over. Love! Heavens and earth! Roderic Clarkson, aged twenty, in love with a wild girl of the prairie! Yes, even—"

"Hello, Roderic, what are you growling about?"

It was his father who hailed him. He had come to relieve him from duty as guard.

"Why, father, is it midnight?" Roderic asked.

"Yes, one o'clock. Fred came in an hour ago without waiting for his relief."

"Did he see anything?"

"He said not, though we all supposed he had, for he was pale as a ghost. Have you seen anything?"

"A person was here a minute ago, who said that Enoch Clarkson and Abram Hammond's families were in imminent danger. It seems that everybody, Ingins and all, know that the Clarksons and Hammonds are in the country."

"Did he tell you his name?" asked the father.

"It was a young girl."

"A girl?"

"Yes, some old hunter or settler's daughter, more daring and romantic than wise," said Roderic, evasively, as he started to the camp. When he reached it, he found that none of the party had gone to bed, but Mrs. Hammond. They were all seated around a glowing fire inside of the little fort—as we will call it—passing the hours as pleasantly as possible in conversation.

Fred Hammond looked a little excited, and started slightly when Roderic entered the fort, but hinted in no way at what he had seen. This fact impressed young Clarkson strangely. There was an air of mystery about it to him, else why did Fred cry out with alarm, and then flee from the presence of that innocent, harmless girl? Surely he was not a coward, as the maiden said he was!

It was quite evident from his talk, that Fred supposed Roderic had not seen the girl, and Roderic resolved to keep what he had seen and heard a secret.

He could not, or at least, did not like to think wrong of Fred. He had always been his most intimate friend; they always, except when Fred was away at school, had been together. And of late, he had noticed that Fred's attentions to Ida were constant, and attended with more than a common interest, although Ida received them with a friendly indifference. In fact, there was not a doubt in his mind but that Fred loved Ida, to which Roderic had no objection, for he had always considered him worthy of any wo-

man's love. But, since his strange conduct on the prairie, he had set Fred down as a coward, or else he was in some manner involved in a mystery, with which Myrtle was connected.

The minutes stole slowly by. Jokes were passed and stories told to pass the time as pleasantly as possible under the restraining circumstances.

Keen-knife kept constantly on the move, though now and then he dropped into the little fort to see that all was going well there. His coming was greeted with words of kindness, and many questions asked him in regard to the situation—the answering of which seemed to afford him great satisfaction.

It was during one of those momentary calls that the ears of the little party were greeted by a far-off savage yell, followed by the prolonged clash of fire-arms.

Keen-knife sprung to his feet, and with contracted brows, bent his head in the attitude of listening.

For fully ten minutes no one scarcely breathed, but, suddenly, the distant bark of a wolf broke dismally out upon the silence.

The eyes of Keen-knife lit up with a glow of recognition, and bounding from the fort he hurried away.

"I wonder what's up now?" asked Fred.

"No telling," replied Roderic; "but I'll guarantee that youth will let no danger come to us, this night."

"Oh, dear, I hope not!" replied Ida. "I can see no romance in wild Indians any more. But Keen-knife is a fine fellow!"

"Yes, he is doing us a great favor," said the elder Mr. Hammond.

Thus the conversation was interrupted by the reappearance of Keen-knife, and, to the surprise of the party, they saw that he was accompanied by a young stranger, clad in the garb of a hunter.

"Hello, Keen-knife!" exclaimed Abram Hammond, "who have you got here?"

"Young hunter—the guide," responded Keen-knife.

"The guide at last!" exclaimed Roderic, advancing and grasping the young stranger's extended hand. "Glad to meet you, young man! By what name are we to know you?"

"Antelope Abe!" responded the youth, for he it was.

"Antelope Abe!" exclaimed Roderic; "is it possible that we are to have that renowned young hunter for a guide?"

"Wal, I'm the boy that Ezra Dorlan sent to guide Clarkson and Hammond to the settlement," the youth replied, without ostentation, as his black, flashing eyes wandered from face to face of the little party. "I had a paper that sed I war the chap, but, as I walked part o' the way here on my head, I accidentally lost it."

"Never mind the paper; the name is a sufficient guarantee, and your face is still a better one. How long since you left the settlement?"

"Two days ago, but the pesky red-skins prevented me from making the lake sooner. The red imps are swarmin' all over the prairie. I b'lieve they grow up outen the ground jest like very nasty weeds."

"I hope," said Roderic, "that none will grow up within gunshot of us."

The young guide stood leaning on his rifle while he talked, and gazing around, he regarded the faces about him and the walls of the little fort with the air of a charitable critic, or inspector; but no difference which way he turned his sparkling eyes, they would mechanically wander back to the sweet, pretty face of Ida Clarkson, with a light of admiration beaming from their depths.

No one noticed this more particularly than did Fred Hammond, and when he saw Ida's dark eyes droop and her face flush almost crimson under the youth's gaze, he saw that he had a formidable rival in the handsome young guide, Antelope Abe.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

WITH the addition of Antelope Abe to the little party of emigrants, the moments now passed pleasantly, despite the dangers that lurked around the camp. The young guide mingled with them as free as though he were one of the family, and conversed in his pleasant, impulsive manner of talking as though he had always known them. It was his nature, developed through force of habit, to make himself at ease and at home wherever he happened to be; and there was an irresistible fascination about his dashing freedom of manner, and the expression of his handsome young face and brilliant eyes, that made a lasting impression upon every heart. It was true, he lacked the polish of society and intellectual culture, but he was not wanting in any of those elements of genuine manhood, that made him the admired and daring young knight of the border that he was.

The night passed without hostile demonstration on the part of the savages. Day dawned, bright and pleasant. It was the Sabbath day, and the sunshine and atmosphere seemed pervaded with a holy serenity. A balmy coolness pervaded the shadowy aisles of the little grove, that was so inviting that the emigrants decided to remain there until the morrow, for it was against their Christian principles to travel on the Sabbath day.

This decision was hailed with joy by the young folks, for long days of travel and nights of vigilance and fear had become irksome. Besides, their hearts were so infused with the spirit of sweetness, that hung like a dream around Silver Basin, that they all longed to tarry there, that glorious Sabbath day.

So, when breakfast was over, and the horses had been watered and tethered out to grass, the young folks strolled out into the grove and along the lake to enjoy the beauty spread out around them.

Toward daybreak, the Indians had withdrawn from the immediate vicinity of the lake; but could be seen, hovering like vultures, at different points on the prairie. But Keen-knife kept a constant watch upon their movements, permitting his young companion, Antelope Abe, to mingle with the emigrants.

The day wore slowly away, and was one of extreme pleasure to the young people, Fred

Hammond excepted. He alone was moody and unsociable.

Toward the close of the day, when Jennie and Ida found themselves seated alone in the grove, Jennie asked:

"Ida, do you know what makes Fred Hammond so sullen, to-day?"

"I have dared to guess at the cause," Ida replied. "He is jealous of the young hunter. I don't like Fred. He isn't a bit like your John."

Jennie blushed at Ida's last remark, and asked:

"Ida, hasn't Fred reason to be jealous of Antelope Abe?"

"If I choose to like the young guide it's none of Mr. Fred's affairs," replied Ida, with a little angry toss of the head.

"Then you admit, Ida, that you do like Antelope Abe?"

Ida raised her face, that was a little flushed, and looking straight into Jennie's eyes, asked:

"Would there be anything improper about it if I did love him, Jennie?"

"No, dear sister; though Antelope Abe is a guide, he is a man, or will make a man, that any woman might be proud of. That is plain to be seen."

"Oh, Jennie, I—but there comes John!"

It was John Hammond whom Ida saw approaching them from the direction of the camp. He was the accepted lover of Jennie, and in every respect worthy of her love. He was a youth of some twenty years, tall and manly to a fault, with dark-blue eyes and firm, pleasant features; a round full voice, and gentle and kind disposition.

Knowing that John was Jennie's lover, as he approached Ida arose and tripped away, while John seated himself by his sweetheart for a lovers' chat.

Ida moved on until she came to the trunk of a fallen tree, upon which she seated herself, and at once became absorbed in deep thought, to which she gave emphasis occasionally by nervously plucking to pieces one of the wild roses which she held in her hand.

Suddenly a shadow fell across her path, and looking up, she saw Fred Hammond standing before her.

"Why, how you scared me!" she exclaimed.

"From a pleasant day dream, Ida?" he asked, seating himself by her side.

"No; I never dream," she replied. "I was thinking."

"Of what?"

"Where I'd be to-day if that Indian had carried me off last night," added Ida.

Fred attempted to smile, and after a momentary silence he said, affecting a tone of deep seriousness:

"Ida, I have longed for this moment to come—when I could be alone with you, and tell you how I have long regarded you—to tell you that I—"

"Why, Fred," exclaimed Ida, evasively, for she saw what was coming. "I always knew that you were one of my best friends."

"But, Ida, my regard for you is far more enduring than friendship: it is—"

"There comes the young guide!" exclaimed Ida, as she caught sight of the youth approaching. "Isn't he a handsome fellow, Fred?"

A scowl swept over Fred Hammond's face, and rising to his feet he moved away, muttering something which Ida could not hear.

Antelope Abe advanced, and stopping before Ida, said:

"I hope, Miss Ida, that my presence wer'n't the cause o' yer friend leavin' ye."

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Smollett. I suppose he went to seek better company," replied Ida.

"He must be hard to please," responded Abe; "but call me Antelope Abe, or jist Abe. Mr. Smollett sounds too stiff to my ears, Miss Ida."

Ida smiled, begged his pardon, and invited him to a seat on the log beside her, which he accepted with manifest pleasure.

Antelope Abe now felt a thrill of keen joy. It was the happiest moment of his life to be seated by that sweet, pretty girl—within the sunshine of her eyes, and the music of her rippling voice—and feel that he loved her with all his soul. And he would have given the world, had he possessed it, to know that his love was returned. But already he had convinced himself that so fair a maiden as Ida could never love a rude borderman like him, with his rough, inelegant speech, bronzed face, and large, clumsy hands, that were forever in the way when in her presence.

They talked about the prairies, the lake, the Indians and their danger, and a little nonsense, and finally Ida asked:

"Do you live at the settlement to which we are going, Abe?"

"No. I live nowhere and everywhere. I have no home in particular, Miss Ida."

"No home?" exclaimed Ida.

"No home, Ida, nor relations, in the world, that I know of. My parents have been dead this ten years."

"You must be very lonely and sad, Abe. I am sure I would die without parents or friends to love me, or to love."

"I've many friends, Ida, but I don't know es thar's a livin' soul that ra'aly loves me. I'm alone in the world. Every boy has his sweetheart, but me. I'm a lost sheep, Ida."

"Perhaps you do not want a sweetheart, Abe. Your heart may be love-proof."

"Not a bit of it, Ida. There was a time when I thought so, but it's not now. Thar's one in the world that I love with all my heart and soul."

"And perhaps, then, your love is reciprocated, Abe?" said the girl.

"It mought be, but I've little hopes. However, you can answer, Ida, for it's you that I love."

"Abe! oh, Abe! you are jesting," Ida exclaimed, her dark eyes glowing with a sweet, tender light and her face flushing almost scarlet.

"I'm not, Ida," he replied; "although it has been but a few hours since I first met you, I loved you from that very moment, and that love has grown on me ever since. Don't git mad at me, Ida, for tellin' ye of it, for I can't help it. I can hardly expect one so fair and bright as you, would fall in love with a green, awkward hunter-boy. But, if I only knowed my love was returned, I'd be the happiest boy in the territory o' Iowa, and mebbe could yet unlearn some of my rough ways."

"Abe," said Ida, her pretty lips quivering with emotion, and a mist of tears gathering in her eyes, "would you believe me if I should tell you that your love is returned?"

"B'lieve it, sweet Ida! Those lips couldn't utter a falsehood. Then you do love me?" he asked, drawing near her, and permitting his arm to steal about her young form.

"Yes, Abe, I love you," she breathed softly, and her little hand crept softly into the hard palm of her boy lover, and for fully five minutes there was a blissful silence, broken only by the wildly-throbbing hearts of the two lovers; then Abe bent down and imprinted upon Ida's pretty red lips, the first seal of a pure and holy love.

The next hour was one of the sweetest bliss to these young people. By the most sacred promises they pledged their hands and hearts to each other, and spoke of the future—the day when mature man and womanhood would qualify them for wedded life. Their cup of joy seemed full, and with brighter hopes to look forward to, they parted.

Ida went back to the camp, feeling that a new life had dawned for her, while her lover went out on the prairie, where Keen-knife was waiting for him to join in a scout around the lake.

Scarcely were the lovers out of sight, when Fred Hammond stepped from behind a clump of bushes near where they had sat, his face black with jealous rage.

He had heard their confession of love and betrothal.

When Antelope Abe, and Keen-knife returned to camp, they brought the discouraging news that not less than a hundred Indians were outlying on the prairie; and their opinion was that the night would not pass without trouble.

Upon receipt of this news, the emigrants began strengthening every point of their defenses. They worked diligently for some time.

Jennie and Ida watched their friends with admiration, and their presence made Antelope Abe and kind-hearted John Hammond feel as though they had something far more dear to work for and protect than their own lives.

Fred Hammond seemed unusually cheerful, though at times he was thoughtful and silent. Roderic noticed it, and wondered what had brought such a sudden spell of sunshine—with its occasional cloud—over his young friend's heart.

When night again fell, the horses were brought in and tied up in the grove, about fifty yards south of the camp. Just beyond them, in the edge of the grove, Fred Hammond was stationed on guard, while his younger brother, Tom Hammond, Roderic, and Antelope Abe, were stationed at other points about the grove—Keen-knife acting as scout.

The old folks and Jennie and Ida and John Hammond and his youngest brother, Howard, went early to bed, and it was not long before the place was wrapt in profound silence.

As the hours stole on, the other guards finally received the startling news through Keen-knife that Fred Hammond was missing from his post and that no trace of him could be found. Fears that the Indians had slain him and concealed

his body for a while were entertained, although no signs of violence were visible where he had stood.

A search was made through the grove, but not a trace of him could be found. It seemed very strange that he should leave the grove, if not slain or captured, knowing that it was surrounded with savages.

An hour or more of anxious searching passed, when, to the surprise and joy of the searchers, Fred made his appearance. He came from the prairie south of the grove, and carried in his hands an Indian bow and a quiver filled with arrows.

He accounted for his disappearance in this manner: He had seen some suspicious object moving over the prairie some few rods away, and in order to investigate its nature, he crept toward it, and as he continued to advance, the object receded, and finally he found that he was quite a distance from camp. On turning about to retrace his footsteps, he discovered a party of Indians near him. To elude discovery he was compelled to lie in the grass for over an hour. After they went away, he resumed his return to the grove, finding the bow and quiver on the way.

So quietude was once more restored, and Fred took his post as guard again. Roderic, however, thought it was singular that Fred would follow an unknown object amid unknown dangers so fearlessly, when the night before he had fled from the presence of a harmless girl. Surely there was something singular in the affair.

The hours wore slowly away. It was just approaching midnight. The moon was just thrusting its long beams of light above the western horizon. It would soon be up, then a new set of guards would be posted.

Roderic had entertained a strong hope that Myrtle would come back again. He could not drive her sweet, fair image from his heart. In fact, he did not want to, but fostered it in his breast, with the hope that they would meet again.

Antelope Abe was extremely happy in his thoughts of prettily little Ida, who then lay sleeping and dreaming of him.

But hark! The dull thud of horses' hoofs is heard in the very heart of the little grove! The next moment eight savages burst from its shadows with a triumphant yell and gallop away over the plain, upon the emigrants' horses!

Careful investigations made by Antelope Abe, revealed the fact that the Indians had entered the grove within ten feet of where Fred Hammond stood guard. From this it was naturally supposed that they had effected that entrance while he was absent; so Fred manfully took the blame upon his own shoulders, expressing the deepest regret for his negligence.

The yell of the savages aroused the sleepers, and for several minutes confusion reigned. When it was known that the horses were stolen, the elder Clarkson and Hammond groaned in spirit, and a pall settled over every face. There was no telling when, or whether, this misfortune would ever be repaired, and they be enabled to resume their journey.

An ominous cloud seemed gathering over them.

New guards were now posted. They were John and Howard Hammond, their father and Enoch Clarkson, assisted by Antelope Abe and the Indian, who concluded their services could not be dispensed with, for they expected an attack every minute from the Indians.

The women again retired to their tents, while Roderic and Tom Hammond, just relieved from duty, sought theirs. But Fred seated himself before the little watch-fire, that burned just outside of the little fort, and became silent and thoughtful. By his side lay the bow and quiver of arrows that he had found on the prairie.

For an hour he sat and gazed into the fire; some deep emotion was struggling within his breast.

Finally he picked up the quiver that lay at his side, and, drawing therefrom three arrows, thrust their barbed points into the fire. He then laid aside the quiver and took up the bow. As he did so, he glanced mechanically around him, and then at the tent in which Jennie and Ida lay asleep.

In a moment the shafts of three arrows were ablaze, and plucking one of them from the fire, Fred arose to his feet, and applying it to the bow, shot it far up into the air. The blazing missile when high above the treetops, described a beautiful curve, and then shot downward, and with a spiteful hiss, fell into the lake a few rods away.

A grim smile of satisfaction overspread the face of Fred Hammond at the success of his amusement, and he turned and was about to pluck another arrow from the fire, when a dark object came whirling through the air and struck him a blow upon the head that felled him, half unconscious, to the earth.

Fred did not cry out, but, regaining his feet, he gazed around him.

No one was visible. He stood alone in the dim glow of the watch-fire.

Was it reality? Had something struck him?

"No, by heavens, it is not!" Fred suddenly exclaimed; "the bow and quiver are both gone, but I will not be defeated! Antelope Abe has crossed my path! he shall never have the girl! he shall die!"

Drawing a pistol from his pocket, he strode away into the darkness, the demon of evil now ruling his heart.

Several minutes passed. A deep silence reigned. But, suddenly, the report of a fire-arm rung out on the still night-air, followed by a cry of mortal agony.

Had Fred Hammond executed his threat? Had he slain Antelope Abe?

Alas! the crack of that weapon and that cry of agony told a fearful tale.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLOATING ISLAND.

THE report of the weapon, and the cry of human agony that followed it, awoke Tom Hammond and Roderic from their sleep. Rising from their pallet, they rushed from the tent to ascertain the cause of the alarm.

But all was silent now. In a moment, however, footsteps were heard approaching, and

then Antelope Abe and Fred Hammond emerged from the grove, bearing something between them.

Advancing to the fire, they laid their burden down upon the ground.

The light streaming over it, showed Tom and Roderic that it was the lifeless body of John Hammond.

"Oh, heavens! what is the meaning of this?" cried Tom.

"A lurking foe has slain poor John," returned Fred.

A cry burst from Tom's lips, and in a minute the whole camp was aroused, and a general excitement prevailed. When the father and mother learned that their boy was shot their sorrow became heart-rending. But none of them suffered more at heart than Jennie Clarkson, when the news came to her that John was dead.

Abram Hammond knelt over the prostrate form of his son and burst into a wail of sorrow, but, suddenly, it became changed into a cry of hope and joy, for he discovered that John was not dead.

"Heaven be thanked! my boy still lives! John is not dead—he breathes! Tom, bring me that brandy from the wagon—quick, for God's sake!"

The brandy was brought and a portion of it administered, and it was soon discovered that John was far from being dead.

Grief was now changed to gladness. On examination, it was found that John had sustained a severe and painful wound. He had been shot in the back of the shoulder, and the bullet striking the shoulder blade, glanced downward and passed out a few inches below. So far as could be ascertained, no bones were broken, but the shock had been so sudden and severe that it had completely paralyzed his body, and rendered him unconscious. In this state he was, at first, mistaken for dead.

The youth soon recovered sufficiently to be able to sit up and have his wound dressed and bandaged as well as the surgical skill of his father and Enoch Clarkson would admit.

When John gazed around him, and saw the tearful eyes of Jennie fixed so sympathetically upon him, his heart gave a bound of joy. Her presence and silent appeals of love and sympathy did more to alleviate his suffering, than all the rest could possibly do for him.

Presently the father inquired how it was that he happened to get shot?

"I was standing," John replied, "in a little clump of bushes gazing out upon the prairie, when suddenly a rifle cracked behind me in the grove—"

"Behind you in the grove?" exclaimed the father.

"Yes."

"Then, by heavens?" exclaimed Fred, "the foe must be lurking in the grove yet! Come, boys!" and followed by Roderic and Tom, he rushed away in search of the hidden foe.

Keen-knife stood by with a grim smile upon his face, and to the surprise of the emigrants, took no part in the search.

For the rest of that night, sleep was banished from every eye, and, after what seemed an age, day dawned bright and pleasant.

But it found the little party of emigrants in

a precarious and helpless situation. Their animals were all stolen, and one of their number lay seriously wounded.

The first thing to be done, however, was to endeavor to recover their horses. To Antelope Abe and Keen-knife this duty fell, or rather they took it upon themselves. But departure from camp at once was prevented by the presence of a number of Indians at different points upon the plain, and fears were entertained that they would not get away before night set in.

The day was attended with many cares, anxieties, and some moments of joy, while the young guide and his red companion were waiting an opportunity to leave camp unseen by the vigilant foe.

Jennie Clarkson never left her wounded lover, and so Ida was alone in her rambles through the grove, save when Antelope Abe found a few minutes' relief from duty now and then, to walk with her, and breathe words of love and joy into her ear.

During one of these occasional meetings, Ida asked:

"Abe, do you think the Indians are likely to attack us?"

"I hardly know. They're actin' so curious. If they had only known it, thar's been several times that they could have kaptured the hull caboodle o' us. I'm afraid they'll break loose soon, and then may God perfect my little Ida."

"Oh, dear Abe, you are so good and kind," returned Ida, joyfully; "but I do hope the Indians will leave soon."

"They're arter sumthin', which they're determined to have without pokin' their own noses into danger. Ye and Jennie must keep clus to camp, little 'un, fur I feel almost sertain that it's you and her they're arter. An Injin has great patience, and to accomplish their object they'd lay out thar in the grass till the buzzards packed 'em off. They're cunnin' and cowardly."

"They must be very cur'ning and sly, that they could get into our camp last night and steal the horses and shoot John Hammond in the cowardly manner they did."

"Ida," and her lover's voice fell almost to a whisper, "John wasn't shot by an Injin. Thar's suthin' wrong in camp. Fred Hammond is actin' strange. He'lllear watchin'. Keen-knife says it war him that shot John, through a mistake. He thought John war me!"

"You, Abe? Fred shot John thinking it was you? Oh, impossible, dear Abe! Why should he wish to slay you?"

"Hullo! there goes Keen-knife's call. I must see what he wants. I'll answer your question when we meet again. Good-by, little 'un."

He kissed her, and turning hurried away. Ida watched him with a light of love and admiration beaming in her dark eyes, until he was out of sight, then she turned and walked slowly down the lake-shore, repeating in her mind the words that her lover had spoken about Fred.

Was he jealous of the young guide? The thought pained Ida, although she could not believe that Fred was such a man as to permit himself to do violence for so trivial an affair. She thought there was some mistake in what Keen-knife had seen and said.

Thus meditating she walked leisurely along

the lake-shore a few rods beyond the fallen tree where she and Jennie first discovered Keen-knife. She might have gone on further, but her footsteps were suddenly arrested by sight of a bunch of water-lilies, which she at once resolved to procure.

The flowers grew at the further extremity of a narrow strip, or point of land that was thrust out into the lake like a tiny peninsula, and was about six feet wide by ten long. It rose but a few inches above the surface of the water, and was completely covered with a dense mat of moss that trailed in the water all round its edges, while here and there, around its sides, grew bunches of long-bladed flags, whose spear-like tips drooped until they touched the surface of the lake.

At the point where the peninsula touched the mainland, the banks of the latter were fully a foot higher than the surface of the former. But without hesitation or fear, Ida sprung down the little bank onto the peninsula, and as she did so, she felt it quiver under her weight, and saw little wavelets circle out from its edges, and the flags dip their points into the water.

But she paid no attention to these, and, tripping along to where the lilies were, she stooped and plucked them. They were very beautiful with their velvet throats and gold-dusted petals, and she stood and admired them with a maidenly enthusiasm.

While thus occupied, she heard a lightplash in the water, such as would be made by a small fish fluttering to the surface of the water for a fly or bug. This she supposed it to be, and remembering the beautiful sights that she and Jennie had seen from the fallen log, she seated herself upon the little moss-festooned peninsula and gazed down into the water.

But she saw no troops of fish with their silvery sides nor beautiful moss of variegated colors. However, she could see the bottom of the lake not over five feet below the surface of the water, and on that bottom, which was either stone or clay—she could not tell which, she was not a little surprised to see the imprint of a human foot. It was of a gigantic size, or the water was possessed of a magnifying power and made it appear larger than it really was. But, in either case, how had it come there? was it a freak of nature, or the imprint of an actual human foot?

Ida sat and gazed for several moments at this mysterious track, then she suddenly covered her eyes with her hand and exclaimed:

"Oh, how it makes my head swim, gazing down into the water!"

She started up, and turning around was in the act of springing to the mainland, when a low cry escaped her lips, and her face turned deadly pale, while, with wildly staring eyes, she gazed about her.

She discovered that she was upon an island, instead of a peninsula, and was fully twenty yards from shore, and still drifting away.

The maiden's first impulse was to scream, but the novelty of her situation enlisted her curiosity so deeply, that she succeeded in overcoming her sudden emotions of fear, and proceeded to make an examination of her floating island.

She saw at once that it was simply a wooden raft dexterously covered with flakes of water-

moss that hung over the edges and trailed in the water; while the flags and aquatic plants that were fixed about it, aided the delusion to a wonderful extent; yet one more observing and cautious than Ida would have discovered the deception, the moment the eye fell upon it.

But from whence did the raft receive its motive power?

As Ida asked herself this question, a terrible suspicion rushed across her young mind, and she was about to cry out for help, when she saw the moss that trailed over the edge of the raft suddenly parted, and the tufted skull, the low, retreating forehead, the black gleaming eyes and the evil, cunning face of an Indian warrior rise quickly to view, followed by another, and still another, until six pairs of gleaming eyes were fixed upon her from around the edge of the raft.

Terror seized upon the maiden's mind, and scream after scream pealed from her lips.

At this juncture the savages threw their half-nude forms upon the raft, and while one seized the terrified girl and stifled her cries, the others drew out from under the moss and plants an oar and four rifles, and while one drove the raft rapidly toward the middle of the lake, the other four stood ready to shoot down the first one who attempted to approach them.

Alas! poor little Ida was a captive at last!

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHANGE OF LOCATION.

"Oh, save me! help! help! help!"

"Great Heaven!" exclaimed Enoch Clarkson, as these imploring words fell upon his ears, "what does that mean?"

"Oh, father!" cried Jennie, "it was Ida's voice! She is in trouble!"

The half-distracted father seized his rifle and ran down to the lake shore, and to his horror he saw his idolized girl standing on a raft far out in the lake.

"Oh, my child! my child!" he groaned, "where is Antelope Abe, and—"

"I'm here."

It was the young hunter who spoke. He had heard Ida's cries, also, and had rushed to the lake close behind Mr. Clarkson.

"Young man, can you not save my child?" the father asked.

"Not now. Look!" responded Antelope Abe.

He pointed toward Ida, and at this juncture they saw six half-naked Indians rise from around the edge of the raft and leap upon it. But they were now beyond rifle-range and still fleeing rapidly toward the opposite shore where a score of mounted warriors were waiting for them.

A groan burst from the father's lips, and was echoed from the young lover's heart.

"What shall we do—what can we do, Abe?" asked Clarkson.

"Defend yer camp!" exclaimed the youth, as the crack of a rifle, followed by a savage yell, was heard to peal out upon the west side of the grove. "Come, Clarkson, the red devils are chargin' on the camp from t'other side."

They turned and ran through the grove to the west side, where they found the rest of the men had already taken their posts with cocked rifles, ready to receive a band of mounted Indians

that were coming like a whirlwind down toward the camp.

For a moment a fearful scene was threatened, and was only averted by the savages seeing that the emigrants were ready to receive them; so, whirling their horses abruptly to the left, they galloped away.

Just as the savages wheeled their animals, a rifle shot pealed out, and a red-skin was seen to throw up his arms and roll to the earth. The aim of Antelope Abe was unerring.

The cowardly red-skins did not attempt to recover their fallen comrade's body but swept away toward the north, and were soon out of sight.

Leaving Keen-knife to watch that side of the grove, Antelope Abe, followed by several others, hurried back to the lake only to see the captive hurried ashore, mounted upon a pony, and carried away toward the north.

"Lost! lost!" groaned the father, and his words smote like a dagger.

"Take it easy, Mr. Clarkson," said Antelope Abe. "They're not likely to harm yer gal, and es long es me and Keen-knife wear our hair over a warm skull, we'll not give up till she is rescued. But there is one thing wuss than that. You're all in imminent danger, and thar's but one way that I can see fur ye to escape."

"And how is that?" asked Abram Hammond.

"Build a raft and take to the lake," replied our hero. "There you can guard ag'in' surprise. It'll take but a leetle while to build a raft outen the logs in the fort; and if ye say it's a whack, I'll show, and be'p ye to build one that'd make Noah open his eyes."

There was not a dissenting voice to the young hunter's suggestion, and in less than ten minutes the little fort was torn down. Then its logs were conveyed to the lake, where, under the supervision of Antelope Abe, the raft quickly took shape.

All worked diligently, in silence and sadness, though Antelope Abe noticed that Fred Hammond seemed inwardly pleased about something, and occasionally caught his eye fixed upon him.

By sunset the raft was completed and afloat. It was about twenty feet long and twelve wide, and was capable of bearing nearly two tons' burden. The tents were removed from the grove and pitched upon the four corners of the substantial floating structure. All their goods were taken from the wagons and placed on the craft. The wagons were then run by hand as far into the lake as possible, to prevent the savages from burning them.

Sand was thrown into the center of the raft, on which to build a fire when necessary for cooking purposes.

The women and the wounded youth were now assisted aboard the float, when it was announced that all was ready to embark.

By means of long poles, the cumbersome platform was pushed out into the center of the lake, where it was anchored by means of the same poles.

Before the departure of the raft from shore, Antelope Abe had suggested that Keen-knife should remain with the emigrants, on account of his superior knowledge of water-craft, and

that Roderic should accompany him in his proposed pursuit of Ida's captors.

The suggestion met with approval, and when the raft floated off, Roderic and Antelope Abe watched the float until it safely anchored; then they shouldered their rifles and pushed northward over the plain.

Keen-knife went around the lake to where Ida's captors had left their cunningly-covered raft, and boarding it, ran it over to the large raft, thus destroying all means of any evil-disposed savages reaching them.

In their new situation the emigrants felt less exposed, yet they were far from feeling safe, while the absence of Ida threw a vail of darkness and sadness over each heart.

They did not forego the precaution of guards, notwithstanding their situation. So after night had fairly set in, Keen-knife and Fred Hammond were put upon guard.

Keen-knife would much rather have stood guard alone, for he was not only obliged to watch out for the Indians, but to watch Fred, also.

By midnight the emigrants were in bed, trying to get the sleep and rest that their worn bodies and troubled minds so much needed.

Just before the moon came up, Keen-knife crept to the opposite end of the raft where Fred was on guard, and to his surprise found him sound asleep.

He did not waken him, for he felt only too glad that he was asleep, and took the whole responsibility of watch upon himself.

But, Fred was not asleep, and scarcely had the Indian turned his back upon him, than he arose and began to divest himself of his clothing.

Keen-knife walked back to his end of the raft, and while there his attention was attracted by that mysterious hand of fire, which had so elicited the wonder and surprise of Antelope Abe and Roderic before.

The hand was on the west shore of the lake, pointing, and at the same time floating northward, apparently ten feet above the surface of the plain.

It remained several minutes within sight, but when it finally faded away, the Indian walked back to the further end of the raft, and to his surprise, found that Fred was gone! His clothes and rifle were lying on the deck, which convinced the Indian that he had taken to the water. But, why had he done so? What had induced him to leave the raft in such a silent manner? Was it a good or evil motive?

The Indian shook his head ominously, and continued his watch.

He was silent for a moment; then he suddenly started up, and with his eyes glowing like balls of fire, his emotions found expression in the muttered words:

"Me know now who he is! Me seen him before! Ugb! White Fox, the great Sioux chief, not dead yet!"

CHAPTER IX.

A MYSTERY.

THE night was beautiful. The air was warm and filled with the delicious fragrance of budding flowers. The moon was up, and its mellow

radiance fell like a curtain of ethereal lace-work over the forest and river—the Checaque River, which seemed a mere thread of silver, coursing its way eastward through the great belt of timber bordering its shores.

Not a sound could be heard save the light ripple of the water chasing the shore, as it circled outward in little waves from the prow of a tiny canoe that was drifting down the river at the will of the current.

There was an occupant in the little craft, and she sat in the attitude of one watching and listening intently. It was Myrtle—the vision that had appeared to Roderic Clarkson on the prairie, the night he stood guard over the camp—the same before whom Fred Hammond fled with terror.

As she continued to drift slowly down the river, she arose to her feet and steadied herself by means of the rifle of which she was possessed. The moonbeams streaming full upon her made her appear a queen of wild beauty.

Her hair was gathered back and permitted to flow in golden ripples down her back. Her head was surmounted with a little red cap ornamented with a single white plume which was fastened over the crown, and its end falling down behind, lay like a snow-flake upon her luxuriant hair. Her frock, which reached just to her knees, was of some dark-green material, and fitted her form neatly, being confined to the waist by means of a beautiful belt of wampum.

If to Roderic she appeared a girl of gentle, child-like loveliness, she now appeared more like the vision of a dream than of stern reality.

For several minutes she maintained her upright position in the little craft, gazing around her like the shy gazelle, with every faculty on the alert. Suddenly her sensitive ears caught the far-off dip of an oar, but it was so very faint that she could not determine the direction from whence it came. So she seated herself, and laying aside her rifle, grasped the paddle and listened.

A cry escaped her lips, for now the quickplash of paddles fell plainly upon her ears, and glancing back, she saw a canoe containing three Indians and a white man, coming rapidly toward her.

The white man was the outlaw, Tim Bodsford!

"Ha! ha!" laughed Myrtle, "they are after me again!"

She plied the paddle with all her strength, and sent the tiny craft fairly skimming over the water, all the time keeping within the ribbon of moonlight in the center of the stream. The current was in her favor, but this advantage was also possessed by the enemy, who no sooner discovered her alarm than they bent to their paddles with renewed exertions.

Myrtle being about forty rods in advance, might have eluded them by taking to the shore. The banks were steep, rugged and wooded, and afforded many places of concealment among their shadowy nooks, but she passed on. From the manner in which she labored at the paddle, and the hopeful glances she cast ahead, it was evident that she hoped to escape by distancing her pursuers on the water.

It was an exciting chase—those four savages

pursuing that wild-eyed, beautiful and mysterious girl! But, after the race had continued for several minutes it became evident that the strength of the fair fugitive was failing. This she saw herself, but uttering no word of fear, she pressed onward.

Suddenly, however, she was startled by seeing a canoe shoot out from the shallows of the right bank into the middle of the stream, then turn and move directly toward her. Its occupant was an Indian, and it was quite evident that he was there to head her off from her hoped-for point of safety.

A firm light of determination flashed in the maiden's eyes, and dropping the paddle, she seized her rifle, and taking aim at the savage, fired.

As the report of the rifle rung out, the savage was seen to leap wildly upward, and, with a wail of agony, fall back into the canoe, which at once began drifting away.

Myrtle again seated herself and seized the paddle, though the delay just occasioned gave the four pursuers several rods the advantage.

But she pressed on, and soon came up with the drifting canoe of the savage. She cast a hasty glance into it, and saw the motionless form lying there, and with a shudder, turned her eyes away. But scarcely had the stern of the canoe passed the prow of the red-skin's craft, when the supposed dead savage arose to his feet, and leaping quickly forward, landed in Myrtle's canoe. He bent forward, and was in the act of seizing her, when a report like a sharp clap of thunder burst over their heads, and, with a wild scream, the Indian staggered, and, with the hot blood spurting from a wound in his naked breast, fell overboard, dead.

This second delay brought the pursuers within a few rods of the fugitive, but she pressed onward a few paces further, then, quicker than thought almost, she turned her canoe and shot it shoreward under the shadow of a high, projecting rock, and was lost to view.

The savages followed on, certain of her capture, but now, to their disappointment, she was nowhere to be found. She had vanished, as if beneath the very waves.

The outlaw was provided, as if for that very purpose, with a dark lantern, whose strong light he now permitted to stream out through the shadows.

They saw that there was no possible chance for the girl to have escaped, either up or down the river, after running under the rock, without their seeing her. But, where was she? She was not under the rock, nor had she left its shadows.

"Cuss the luck; she's vanished again!" growled the outlaw, Bodsford. "She's a bein' not o' earth."

"The pale-face speaks truly," replied one of the savages, "for when our friend sprung into her canoe, did not a lightning's bolt shoot out from the solid face of the spirit-rock and strike him dead?"

"Ugh!" exclaimed the other savages, with superstitious terror. "The great Medicine speaks truly."

The vivid glare of the outlaw's lantern showed

that the rock rose about four feet straight up from the water's edge, then shot out over the river about ten feet, leaving plenty room for the defeated pursuers to sit erect in their canoes under the gigantic rock.

They examined the rock at the side and even overhead for the mouth of a cavern wherein the girl might have escaped, but its faces were solid and worn smooth by the friction of high waters, and the relentless hand of time.

They beat upon the walls with their tomahawks, but only the clear, solid ring of the metal was given back.

They listened, but all was silent as the grave, save the beating of their own cowardly hearts.

They lingered under the rock for nearly an hour, and at last becoming convinced that they were treading upon an enchanted spot, they headed their canoes down the river and sped rapidly away.

But scarcely were they out of sight before that tiny canoe, with its fair young occupant, shot out from the shadows of that very rock into the moonlit current, turned and followed down the river in the wake of the outlaw and his Indians.

CHAPTER X.

A DEFEATED VILLAIN.

On a small island in the center of the lake, a glowing camp-fire was burning, and although it was now past midnight, a score of savages were grouped around it. In the background stood a little bower made of vines and bushes twined around poles set in the shape of a pyramid, all of which must have been brought there for that purpose, for the island was simply a low, barren sand-bar.

Within the little bower, seated upon a couch of furs and blankets, sat Ida Clarkson, a helpless captive, though she was not bound. She had wept till her eyes were red and swollen, but, finding that her tears had no effect upon the cruel hearts of her captors—that they only smiled at her weakness and humble petitions to be restored to her friends—she became silent and resigned; yet a spirit of indignation and courage grew continually in her young heart, and more than once she was tempted to try to escape.

She was now some twelve miles from her friends. The long ride from the lake had been very tiresome to her in her sad spirits, and she felt greatly relieved when her captors drew rein upon the banks of the Checaque river. But when she was taken to the island and placed in the little bower erected for her she felt that there was little hope of escape. But, cheering herself with the happy thought that her lover would come to her rescue, she became somewhat reconciled to her new situation.

After she had been in the bower some time, she parted the bushes and peered out upon the group of savages, but their repulsive forms and faces caused her to turn away with disgust. She looked out on the other side and saw the moonlit waters sweeping wildly around the island, and the dark-green woodland beyond. She then glanced up the stream and discovered a canoe coming down toward the island. Her heart gave a bound of joy, for she thought it might contain Antelope Abe and some of her friends coming to her rescue, never dreaming of the fearful odds which there awaited them.

But her hopes were soon blasted, for, as the canoe approached, a yell from its occupants told that they were Indians. Her captors answered their shout, and in a few moments they had reached the island and landed.

Ida heard a voice speaking English among them, and parting the foliage, she again peered out upon the crowd,

She saw a white man among the new-comers, but his bearded face was more savage and brutal-looking than the Indians, and she sunk with a shudder when she saw him fix his leering eyes upon the bower, and exclaim:

"That bower tells me, Ingins, that ye've got the gals."

"One of 'em, only got," Ida heard an Indian reply.

"Only one!" exclaimed the outlaw, Tim Bodsford, for he it was; "wal, mus' have a sight o' her."

Turning, he advanced to the bower, and parting the foliage peered in. To conceal his hateful face from her eyes, Ida feigned sleep. The desperado gazed admiringly on her for a moment, then turned away.

"By crash!" he exclaimed, "she's a angel. But, w'ar's the other'n? The scout said thar war two o' 'em."

"Couldn't git her," responded the Indian. "White Fox meet us, and—"

"White Fox!" exclaimed the outlaw; "do ye mean to say that White Fox has turned up ag'in?"

"Yes; he come back. He fix to git other white squaw; we promise to meet to-night on prairie—meet White Fox."

"Wal, this beats me blind! White Fox back and alive. Wal, we come durned nigh colchin' his gal, Murtie, ter-nite!"

"How near?" asked the Indian, with a quizzical grin.

"So nigh that we seen her, an' got one o' our Ingins killed."

A boisterous laugh followed this reply.

"Does the chief want one o' the gals?" Bodsford asked.

"Yes; he want this one," replied a savage, pointing to the bower. "He make her his wife."

This news sent a chill to Ida's heart—she, to be made the wife of a savage!

The red-skins and the outlaw conversed for some time, then followed a general movement. Ida saw them pushing their canoes into the water, and knew from this that they were about to leave the island.

Where they would take her to next, she had not the slightest idea, but she was not a little surprised when she saw the savages all depart from the island, and leave her alone with the renegade.

She felt more uneasy now than ever, for she feared the white desperado more than the savage red-men. However, all her natural courage had come back to her, and she began to think about outwitting the villain in some way or other, and of escaping. The savages had left but one canoe, a large, cumbersome craft, that was drawn entirely out of the water onto the island, and whether the outlaw intended to take her away in it at once, or await the return of the Indians, she could not tell.

When the Indians were out of sight, the outlaw turned, and going to the bower, looked in. As before, Ida saw him approaching, and feigned sleep. When he went away, she watched him closely. He put out the fire by tossing the brands into the river. Still, the moonlight made it almost light as day. He now took a blanket from the canoe and wrapped it around him, and then seated himself close up against the bower, at the same time drawing his revolver from his belt, and laying it at his right side, ready for instant use. Ida observed this, and smiled at the idea it suggested to her.

The outlaw retained his position by the bower for some time, when he finally began nodding, and Ida saw that he was growing drowsy with slumber.

Our heroine's courage gained strength. She began to think of escape more firmly than ever. But how? There was a canoe, but it was so large that it would take the strength of the outlaw himself to launch it. She could not swim, so she was defeated thus far in her plans. But she kept her mind actively at work, and finally she asked herself if the outlaw wasn't a coward, and what she could accomplish by working upon his fears.

If she had been a woman of a more mature mind, she would not have entertained, for a moment, the rash design that she meditated. But the impulsiveness of youth seldom ponders over and weighs the probabilities of success in such matters, and so Ida carefully pushed her hand through the bower and possessed herself of the outlaw's revolver.

She now held the life of the villain in her power, for she was no novice in handling a weapon of that kind. But she did not want to commit murder; she would rather remain a captive. Even if she had slain him, she could not have escaped from the island, for she knew she could never launch the canoe. *She would compel him to launch it for her!*

With revolver in hand, she glided from the bower. The outlaw heard her and started up, gazing around him confusedly; and when his eyes fell upon Ida Clarkson standing a few paces away, with the revolver leveled full at his breast, they dilated with abject terror, and his face blanched with deadly fear.

"Advance one step and you're a dead man!" exclaimed Ida, in a slow, firm, and fearless tone, that sounded like the voice of doom to the shrinking miscreant.

It was fully a minute—during which time he kept backing away—before the villain could comprehend his situation and gain breath to speak. When he did, he clutched at his belt, exclaiming:

"See here, my little lassie, two can play—"

He did not finish the sentence, for he found that his revolver was gone. The discovery shocked him with terror.

"I have your revolver pointed at your heart," said Ida. "Advance one step and I fire!"

"Be careful, little girl," the fellow gasped, attempting to appear indifferent, "that's a dangerous weapon to fool with."

"I know it," replied Ida, with unslinching courage, "and I will give you five minutes to do one thing."

"Happy to do it," the villain said, hoping that by humoring her, he might catch her off her guard and disarm her; "what will ye have me do, sissy?"

"Launch that canoe!" returned Ida.

The villain hesitated. He saw through her whole intention, and cursed himself for his stupidity in letting her get possession of the weapon. He had never thought of such a thing—such courage in a young girl. He was a coward at heart, and although he hated to lose the little beauty, he would rather that than lose his own life.

"Will you, or will you not, launch that canoe?" Ida asked, seeing that he hesitated.

"Oh, certainly," he replied, backing toward the canoe, but all the time keeping his eyes fixed upon the dark tube in the maiden's hand.

With a powerful effort the outlaw pushed the canoe into the water, and scarcely had its stern left the beach, when he made a quick leap, and threw himself into it, face downward; and the impetus of the leap, and the force of the water, which here swept swiftly around the island, carried the canoe and the outlaw far down the stream in a second's time.

Ida fired twice at the cunning villain, but his body was protected by the thick side of the canoe, and in a few minutes he had drifted beyond danger of the weapon.

"Great Heaven!" cried Ida, "he has defeated me after all. How can I get away from this island? He is gone with the canoe, and will bring the Indians all back upon me!"

"Hal ha! ha!" laughed the villain, raising himself in the canoe. "I war a leetle too sharp fur ye, missey, and now git erway frum that, if ye can, afore I send a pack o' red-skins to fetch ye away."

Ida felt like sinking down with despair, but at this juncture she heard the dip of an oar behind her, and turning she saw a little canoe, with a female occupant, approaching the island.

It was that strange, wild beauty, Myrtle.

In a minute the sharp prow of the little craft

touched upon the island, and then its young fair occupant said, in a hurried tone:

"Dear miss, you are in danger! Come; flee with me!"

With a cry of joy, she ran to the edge of the island, and leaped into the little canoe.

"Oh, who are you," she cried, "that has come to help me?"

"I am Myrtle, and are you not one of Enoch Clarkson's daughters?"

"Yes; I am Ida Clarkson; but you are a stranger, and how do you know that I am Enoch Clarkson's daughter?"

"I merely judged so," replied Myrtle. "But I will tell you more if we escape. Hear, the outlaw is calling for his Indians! We must flee!"

Myrtle grasped the paddle, and sent the little craft flying out into the stream, then turned and moved up its course.

They had journeyed but a little way, however, before discovering that they were pursued by the outlaw, and several Indians, whom he had succeeded in bringing to his assistance by his yells. And almost simultaneously with this discovery, they saw another canoe coming down the stream. It was not over a hundred yards away, and the fugitives saw that it contained three occupants—a man and two dogs.

"Oh, Heaven, Ida Clarkson!" cried Myrtle, "there is no other course for us but to take to the woods. But I fear even then, escape will be impossible! That man coming yonder is known as Death-Trail, and the dogs by his side are bloodhounds!"

As she concluded, Myrtle headed the canoe toward the north shore, and in a minute more they were landed.

"Give me your hand, Ida, and let us run," said Myrtle.

They grasped each other's hand, and with wildly-beating hearts, darted away through the dark, wooded aisles.

They had not gone far when a sound fell upon their ears that sent a chill of terror to their young hearts.

It was the baying of Death-Trail's bloodhounds that were upon their track, and now, may God help them!

CHAPTER XI.

THE FOE IN THE DARK.

We will now follow the adventurous footsteps of Antelope Abe and Roderic Clarkson. After leaving the lake, they pressed rapidly forward on the trail of Ida's captors; but darkness found them some distance from the timber bordering the Checaque river.

The trail was broad and plain. The grass, trodden down by so many hooved feet, would require some time to straighten up again, and to the practiced eyes of the young hunter, this track was as plain as a road.

When the timber was reached, it was far in the night. They were now about five miles from the river, and as there was no moon yet, they found more difficulty in following the trail through the forest-shadows. No time, however, was to be lost, so they pressed on in silence, as fast as possible; but they soon found that unexpected obstacles were likely to beset their path.

Antelope Abe had caught the outlines of a shadowy form flitting from tree to tree before them; and he knew at once the savages had anticipated pursuit, and were ambushing their trail.

After they had journeyed a short distance into the woods, Antelope Abe suddenly halted and said:

"We're goin' to have trouble, Roderic. Thar's Ingins layin' along this trail, and we've got to wait for daylight, or leave the trail and foller the red-skins at random."

"Do that which you think the safest and most excellent," said Roderic; "anything so we rescue poor little Ida."

"Well, let's make a wide *detour* from this point,

and strike the trail half a mile further north. Then by repeatin' the *detour*, we can keep the course o' the trail without follerin' it."

"Lead the way, and I'm with you," replied Roderic.

Antelope Abe struck to the right and moved quickly away, followed by his companion.

Half an hour's journeying brought them back to the trail again, and here they stopped to listen.

To the north of them a few paces they heard savage voices quite distinctly, and dropping back into the shadows, they awaited the approach of the party. But they soon discovered that the savages had either encamped or made a temporary halt, and, thinking it might be the party they were pursuing, our two friends concluded to reconnoiter their situation; so, creeping silently forward, they soon found themselves on the edge of a moonlit glade, in which they discovered a score of mounted savages sitting and reclining lazily upon their beasts, talking and laughing in a boisterous manner. But Ida was not among them, and our friends thought it more than probable that they had been following the wrong party.

Antelope Abe soon learned from their conversation that they were waiting for their chief, and turning to Roderic, he whispered:

"They're waitin' fur their chief, White Fox, I hear 'em say, Roderic; and that's durned curious, too, for White Fox was reported killed 'bout six months agone. At least, he disappeared, and I hain't heard o' him till this minute."

"Been away on a mischief-making spree, I suppose," said Roderic; "but have they said anything of a captive?"

"Nothin' yit; p'raps they will—listen! Hark! Thar comes their chief."

The clatter of hoofs was heard approaching from the south, and in a few moments more three Indians rode into the opening on panting mustangs. One of them was the chief.

A yell greeted their arrival, and the name, White Fox, was shouted from every mouth, as the warriors spurred their ponies around him.

He (the chief) was a tall Indian, gaudily bedecked in flashy ornaments and jeweled garments of fantastic pattern. A rich head-dress of red and white feathers and small silver stars, glittering in the crimson band, gave him a princely appearance and an air of dignity. His form was erect and commanding, and his face, although bedaubed with paint, was decidedly handsome for an Indian's.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Roderic, in an undertone, "he is a fine-looking fellow."

"Yas, he's a remarkable chief—cruel as handsome. For some time we've been rejoicin' over his supposed death. I'd like to know whar the deuce he's been."

"Hark!" exclaimed Roderic, "he is speaking!"

The Indians having become quiet around him, the chief exclaimed:

"Braves of the Sioux, and followers of White Fox, your chief is very glad to meet you again. You have wondered at his long absence; you supposed he had gone to the happy hunting-grounds; but he went away secretly on a saered mission, because the great Manitou whispered to him in the winds and told him to go, and go secretly."

Although Roderic did not understand a word he said, only as Antelope Abe interpreted it, he started as though he had been shot, and grasping his companion by the arm, exclaimed:

"My God, that voice!"

"What 'bout it?" asked Abe.

"If it wasn't for his being an Indian I would swear it was Fred Hammond's voice!"

Abe made no reply, but enjoined silence, in hopes of catching the rest of the chief's remarks. In this he was disappointed; for the conversation was now carried on in an undertone, and in a moment the whole party turned and proceeded northward.

Our friends followed, but soon discovered that they were being followed also, and were compelled

to drop from the trail of the chief and his party. But the shadows that were dogging their footsteps now vanished. This vexed Abe, for, in his anxiety to rescue his little sweetheart, he had grown sorely impatient. But caution and prudence were predominant traits in the character of the young borderman, and so he resolved to know what it wa, that was following them.

"Roderic," he said, "just wait right here a minit, and I'll reconnoiter our situation in the rear. Thar's Ingins about, and they're bound to give us trouble."

Antelope Abe moved away with such secrecy that to Roderic he seemed to float off on the air.

A deep and painful silence now ensued. The minutes stole by on leaden feet. An hour had passed. Roderic began to chafe in spirit at Abe's protracted absence. He could not think any danger had befallen him, for he had not heard a sound of any kind since he had left. But with the impatience of an unskilled borderman, he finally moved from his covert and uttered a low whistle which he hoped would be the means of recalling his friend. But several minutes more passed, and Abe did not come, so he ventured to whistle a little louder.

Simultaneous with the sound, something came clipping through the foliage and striking Roderic on the arm, almost paralyzed his whole body. A low cry escaped his lips when he discovered that he had been severely wounded by a barbed arrow.

Hearing footsteps approaching, he turned and glided away, but he at once became aware that he was being pursued.

With the blood trickling from his wound, and a sharp pain thrilling every nerve, he exerted himself to his utmost, and ran on and on. But at last, overcome with exhaustion and weak from the loss of blood, he sunk fainting to the earth!

The moon had just risen when Antelope Abe—after an hour's absence—came back to where he had left Roderic, but was not a little surprised to find that he was gone.

"Humph!" ejaculated the young hunter, "got tired waitin' for me, and followed on after White Fox, I reckon."

However, he waited and then searched, but all in vain. He was too prudent to call him, but the supposition that he had grown impatient and moved on after White Fox gained favor in his mind, and so he at once set off in the same direction.

An hour's walk brought him to the river-bank, but he saw nothing of Roderic. White Fox and party, on reaching the river, he found, had turned downstream with the intention, probably, of crossing at a ford some distance below.

Antelope Abe paused on the river-bank to ponder over his misfortune in getting separated from Roderic. Just before him lay the little island on which Ida had been confined, and from which she had escaped but a few minutes before. As it lay within the full light of the moon, our hero caught sight of the little bower upon it, and his curiosity at once became deeply involved in speculation over it. He saw that the island was deserted, and at once decided to cross over and inquire into the nature of the little conical structure.

Without spending time in searching for a canoe, he constructed a raft of driftwood in a few minutes, and then proceeded to the island.

He first examined the bower. He saw that it had been recently erected, and within it he found a couch of blankets and skins. Why they had been left he could not tell.

On the island he saw innumerable moccasin-tracks, and among them he discovered the imprint of a small shoe, which left not a single doubt in his mind but Ida had been a prisoner there, and had not long been gone.

While pondering over the situation, the yells of Indians, mingled with the baying of hounds, fell upon his ears.

CHAPTER XII.

AN ANGEL OF MERCY.

THE terror of Ida Clarkson and the wild beauty, Myrtle, when they found that they were being pursued by two kinds of bloodhounds, can better be imagined than described. Their hearts almost ceased to beat, and although they were running swiftly, it seemed as though a terrible weight clung to their feet, and an unseen obstacle obstructed their way.

Death-Trail was a brother of the outlaw, Tim Bodsford, and he rendered himself as terrible as his name implied, by means of his bloodhounds, from which no fugitive had ever escaped, either being torn to pieces or trailed to his or her covert. For some time these outlaw brothers had followed the nefarious work of stealing women and children from the emigrants and settlers, and selling them to the chiefs of the different Indian tribes, or holding them for ransom, and yet never had been caught.

The fugitives ran on and soon entered a beaten deer-path leading from the river back into the forest. This they were enabled to follow with greater speed and ease, but it gave an equal advantage to the pursuers.

Ida still retained the outlaw's revolver and Myrtle her rifle, but these would avail them little if overtaken.

After entering the deer-path, Myrtle took the lead, and while they were flitting from shadow to shadow, and through thicket and glade, she suddenly stopped with a low cry of sudden alarm.

"Oh, mercy, look there, Ida!"

Ida looked as directed, and saw a large black beast seated on his haunches in a little moonlit glade before them directly in their path.

"Oh, dear! what is it, Myrtle?" Ida asked.

"A bear," replied Myrtle, "and I'm going to shoot it. It might be the means of saving our lives."

As she concluded, the wild beauty raised her rifle and fired. But, her arms were nervous and trembling with excitement and exhaustion, and her aim was untrue. The bullet only wounded the bear, who with a roar of pain, arose to his feet and went lumbering toward the fugitives.

With a cry of terror, the girls turned and fled into the woods, and the bear following along the path a short distance was about to turn out after them, when the hounds of the outlaws were heard on the trail, and in a few moments bear and dogs were engaged in a fierce combat.

"Oh, Ida isn't that fortunate for us?" exclaimed Myrtle, when some distance to the right of the path.

There was no response, and Myrtle repeated the question, but not until this moment did she notice Ida was not present!

She listened, and to her horror she heard a scream, which she knew to be Ida's, peal out above the noise of the struggling bear and hounds. Then she knew that, in fleeing from the bear, they must have become separated when they turned from the path, and poor Ida had been captured again.

No time was to be lost, so Myrtle hurried back toward the river, and when she reached its banks, she was almost exhausted. She found her canoe where they had deserted it, and, hastily embarking, she soon put the river between her and the savages.

On the south side of the river, about a mile above the little island where Ida was confined, she ran her canoe into a little cove where the drooping willows and foliage of the trees on the bank would almost defy detection even in daylight. There she decided to remain concealed until she had rested her almost exhausted body.

At this juncture she was sure she heard a groan as of human agony coming from out in the woods. But as it was not repeated, she concluded it was an echo from her own heart, and relapsed into thought again.

The minutes stole by—even lengthened into hours, and ere Myrtle was scarcely aware of it, it was daylight—the sun was shining over the forest and river, and the woods were vocal with the songs of birds.

Arousing from her mental stupor, Myrtle gazed around her with an air of precaution that is born of backwoods life and danger. Having thus interrogated her situation, she glanced upward through the foliage and saw a number of buzzards sailing above the tree-tops a short distance south of her. She knew at once that they were attracted there by something dead or wounded. And somehow or other, that groan which she thought she heard in the night, instantly became associated with the presence of the birds. Probably a human being either dead or wounded, lay in the woods not far away, and she resolved to investigate the matter at once.

With her rifle resting in the hollow of her left arm, she stepped from her canoe, and with every faculty on the alert, moved away through the woods. She had traveled some forty rods when she stopped in a little opening to watch the buzzards; some of them were sailing in the air almost directly over her, while others were perched in the top of a tree a few rods south of her, their keen eyes fixed on a little thicket of undergrowth directly beneath them.

For a moment she stood undecided whether to advance or not; then she stole noiselessly forward. As she approached the thicket, the buzzards arose from their perch and sailed away.

At the edge of the thicket the maiden stopped and listened, but all was silence. Parting the bushes she moved forward a few paces and again stopped. Her form became motionless and her eyes fixed like one entranced as they fell upon the prostrate form of a white man lying in the thicket before her. He was not dead, but asleep; this she saw at a glance. His left arm was bare and bloody, showing a deep wound upon it.

The face seemed familiar to Myrtle, although it was pale and wore an expression of great pain.

A low cry of surprise and sorrow escaped her lips when she recognized the face as that of Roderic Clarkson! She saw that he had been wounded, and was suffering great pain, and that a delirious fever had set in.

She stole softly forward, and bending over the sleeper, was in the act of awakening him, when she saw his lips open, and heard him mutter:

"Oh! Heaven! am I to die here?—with this fever burning me up? Oh, if she would come; come to me and give me a cup of water, water, water!"

"Roderic! Roderic!" exclaimed Myrtle, "rouse up; I am—"

Roderic started from his delirious sleep, and rising to a sitting posture, gazed wildly up into the face of the vision of his troubled dream.

"Is it reality?" the wounded youth exclaimed, "is it possible that it is daylight? I dreamed that I called for you, and here you are! Where am I? Where is Antelope Abe?"

"I know not," replied Myrtle, "but you are wounded and suffering."

"I am burning up with fever and pain. Oh, Myrtle! is there no water near?"

"The river is not far away. I will bring you some water in your hat."

"I can walk, Myrtle; I will go to the river."

With the assistance of Myrtle, Roderic arose to his feet, and, after several minutes' slow walking, they came to the river.

Myrtle formed a cup of a broad-leaved plant, and gave the wounded youth water to drink. It quenched the internal fever at once, and then, with the assistance of the gentle girl, he washed and dressed his wound, which had become greatly swollen and inflamed.

While thus engaged, Roderic related the disaster that had brought him there, how he had become separated from Antelope Abe, how he had been

wounded and then fled from his unknown enemy until he fell from exhaustion.

Myrtle did not tell him of her meeting and subsequent separation with Ida, for fear the news would bring on undue excitement and aggravate his wound. But after he had become somewhat rested and his pain alleviated, she said:

"We are in danger here, Mr. Clarkson. My home is but a few minutes' travel by water from here, and you must go with me there, for you are unable to go back to the lake alone."

Roderic expressed the warmest thanks for her kindness, and most joyfully accepted her invitation.

In a few minutes they were both seated in the little canoe, and moving slowly and silently up the river, chatting as though no danger was near.

But in the midst of their love-dream the keen eyes of Myrtle discovered a canoe containing four Indians in pursuit of them!

"We are being pursued, Roderic," said Myrtle calmly, plying the paddle with all her strength; "but a few minutes will place us beyond all danger."

The savages were yet a considerable distance away, but approaching rapidly. Roderic's wound rendered his arm stiff and useless, and when he found he was unable to assist the maiden, he fairly groaned with regret.

The savages gained upon them at every stroke, and were within easy range of the fugitives when the little craft of the latter turned and shot into the shadows of a projecting rock on the north shore. It was the same rock whereunder Myrtle had disappeared from the renegade and Indians the night before.

In a few minutes the savages' craft glided under the rock after the fugitives, but to their surprise and superstitious wonder, the whites were nowhere to be seen. They had vanished, as if swallowed up in the stream.

They searched for the mouth of a cavern in which they might have escaped, but all was rock-solid rock!

CHAPTER XIII. THE HUMAN BRUTE.

WHEN Ida Clarkson turned to flee from the wounded bear, she became separated from Myrtle in the darkness. She had turned to the left instead of the right, as Myrtle had done, and before she had noticed the mistake, it was too late to rectify it. Myrtle was gone, and the hounds, with the outlaws and savages at their heels, had come up and attacked the wounded bear.

With a low cry of terror Ida fled she knew not whither, to find herself the next moment seized by a pair of strong arms.

It was then that she uttered the scream which reached the ears of Myrtle.

"Ye needn't waste yer breath screamin', missey," a voice hissed in her ear, which Ida recognized as that of Tim Bodsford, the outlaw; "I'll take my revolver now, and then take ye back to the island whar ye'll occupy that little bower till mornin'. Ye see, I'm inawster o' ther situation now, Miss Wilfire."

She was taken back to where the hounds and bear were fighting. The conflict lasted but a few minutes. The bear killed one of the hounds and wounded the other seriously, when the savages came to the rescue and slew the forest beast.

The party now began retracing their footsteps toward the river, the outlaw, Death-Trail, cursing with impotent rage over the loss of his hound, while his brother Tim was fairly dancing with joy over the recapture of the maiden.

The whole party at once embarked in their canoes, and in a few minutes were back upon the island from whence Ida had escaped. The little bower still remained just as she had left it, with its couch of blankets and buffalo-robés within.

Having tied her hands together, Bodsford led Ida

to the bower, and pulling the foliage over the door, said:

"Go in thar, missey, and when ye steal another revolver or come out o' thar, let me know it, won't ye? I purpose to clear a cool thousand dollars out o' ye, to Mister White Fox, Esq., chief o' the Sioux."

Sad at heart, Ida seated herself upon the couch and burst into tears. It was several minutes before she regained her composure, and then, in changing her position, she suddenly became conscious of a slight movement under the couch beneath her.

Her first impulse was to cry, but the cry was suppressed.

"Ida!" was called in a low tone beneath the blanket's folds.

It was dark as midnight within the bower, but the next moment a human hand touched her own.

"Silence, Ida; it is Antelope Abe."

Ida's heart seemed to rise into her throat; and for a moment, she feared its fluttering would betray her emotions. Leaning forward, she whispered to her lover, who had now uncovered his head:

"Oh, Abel your life is in imminent peril. A dozen Indians are here, besides two white outlaws."

"Be careful and cautious, Ida. I will rescue you or die in the attempt." replied Abe, uncovering his shoulders and rising upon his elbows.

The savages and outlaws without were busily engaged in striking a fire and bandaging the wounds of a hound which had escaped the fury of the bear, and whose doleful howls drowned even the voices of the savages.

The circumstances under which Antelope Abe came to be concealed in the bower are these: after visiting the island, as previously recorded, and the bay of the bloodhounds had fallen upon his ears, he hastened ashore and set off to follow the hounds, and when Bodsford recaptured Ida, he heard the villain remark that she should spend the remainder of the night in the bower on the island from which she had just escaped. He would have attempted the maiden's rescue then and there, but the darkness prevented him from gaining any knowledge of the situation and number of the savages. So he hastened back to the river, and divesting himself of his outer clothing, and concealing them with his rifle and accoutrements, with no weapon but his knife and a small Indian tomahawk, he swam to the island and concealed himself in the bower.

Creeping from beneath the couch, Abe proceeded to examine the situation. He saw that the canoes were beached on one side of the island, while the savages were encamped on the other side. The bower stood between, and its shadow covered one of the canoes.

After Death-Trail had bandaged his dog's wounds, the party seated themselves around the fire of driftwood. It was now the hour before dawn. The air was growing damp and chilly; so the savages, who were naked to the waists, took their blankets and threw them, hoodlike, over their heads.

Antelope Abe listened, and heard them talking about the captive and White Fox; and presently he heard Tim Bodsford say:

"I b'lieve I'll take the captive down to the hut and keep her thar till White Fox comes erround. One o' ye Ingins can go with me, and the others can look out fur persuers. If that cussed Antelope Abe war at the lake, I'll guar'ntee he'll be pokin' his nose erbout arter the gal, and one to two he'll git her, if we hain't keerful. Durn him, I don't b'lieve he can be killed."

Abe could not repress a smile at the villain's remarks, but the outlaw's intention of taking Ida away would frustrate his plans, and without a doubt endanger his own life.

Presently Bodsford arose, and having selected the Indian whom he wanted to accompany him, said:

"Swift-foot, you bring the gal out and I'll launch the canoe."

The Indian, a small, lithe fellow, with a long, red blanket thrown over his head and shoulders, and drawn closely around his face, advanced to the bower for the young maiden, while Bodsford proceeded to launch the canoe.

There was a general stir among the savages now, and during the hurry and confusion, one of the savages stepped on Death-Trail's wounded dog, which at once set up a fearful howl of pain, that was followed by an outburst of laughter from the savages.

At this juncture, and during the confusion, Swift-foot entered the bower.

Bodsford half-launched the canoe, and, having seated himself therein, took up the paddle and awaited the coming of Swift-foot with the captive.

"Durn the Injin, what's keepin' him?" the outlaw exclaimed, as his red servant did not appear on the instant. "Thunder! the girl could cut his throat and nobody'd know it for that cussed bound's belerin'. Come, Swift-foot, drag her erlong—that's it!"

The last words were directed to the Indian, who, with his long blanket still over his head and concealing his face and his form to his heels, emerged from the bower, half-dragging the captive at his side.

"Right in here, ye little muless!" exclaimed Bodsford, as, in the darkness, he seized Ida and pulled her into the canoe, and forced her to a seat in the bottom of the craft.

The renegade, seating himself in the further end of the canoe, said:

"Now push her off, Swift-foot, an' we'll be off afore daylight comes."

Giving the canoe a shove out in the stream, the Indian leaped in and took his station in the end that now became the prow, while Ida lay on the canoe bottom between the two men.

Bodsford plied the paddle vigorously.

"I guess yer goin' now, my little lady," said the outlaw, when some distance from the island, "whar ye'll not git erway soon, unless a thousand dollars from White Fox takes ye."

Ida rose to a sitting posture, and in the darkness passed something to the Indian.

"Ugh!" ejaculated the Indian. Then, reaching forward over the captive, he unceremoniously thrust a revolver into the ruffian's very face, as, in plain English, he exclaimed:

"One word above a whisper and you're a dead man, Tim Bodsford!"

The blanket was thrown back from the head and face of the supposed Swift-foot, and the young guide, Antelope Abe, stood before the defeated, dumfounded outlaw.

The outlaw sat like one transfixed. He possessed no weapon now, for the deft hand of Ida had, under cover of the gloom, taken from the ruffian's belt his only weapon, a revolver, that, by the motion of paddling, was almost ready to fall from its fastening. It was this which she had passed to the supposed Indian. Abe had not anticipated this brave act, and expressed his surprise by a hearty "Ugh!"

Bodsford was now wholly in the power of the young guide.

"I know you're surprised to see me here," said Abe; "but the fact is, your friend, Swift-foot, is quiet enough in the little bower on the island where I was concealed. I induced the Indian to change places with me by a blow on the head with a tomahawk. You'd 'a' heerd the blow if it hadn't been fur yer brother outlaw's hound, who set up a very pleasant yellin'. I then took yer friend's blanket and dressed myself up into it, and here I am. Now if you want to save your miserable self from bein' shot, jist take hold o' the paddle and turn this canoe to'ard the north shore. And work lively, or I plug ye as sure as my name is Abe."

The great, burly outlaw saw that there was no alternative but to obey. He knew the youth in whose power he was, and like a whipped cur he did as commanded.

When the shore was reached Abe, with Ida's help, gagged the outlaw; and then, removing the paddles from the canoe, sent the villain adrift.

"There, I hope we're rid o' that villain fur a while," said Antelope Abe, as he watched the canoe with its burden drifting away down the river.

The youth and his fair charge now moved up the river. Soon they came to where he had left his rifle and outer clothing when he swam to the island. Donning the clothes, he took the Indian's blanket, which he had worn up to this time, and wrapped it around Ida, for the air was growing chilly.

They continued on a short distance further, when, from sounds heard in the distance, they had every reason to believe the outlaw had escaped from the bonds and gag, or else the body of the Indian had been discovered.

They moved on up the river a mile or more, then, as a steep and rugged bluff appeared before them, they kept to the right with the intention of passing around the hills.

They had not gone far when Antelope Abe discovered that they were being followed by a number of Indians.

He said nothing to Ida of this startling discovery, for fear of undue excitement, but turning abruptly to the left, he led her up a narrow defile between two towering bluffs. The Indians, he knew, had not seen them yet but were trailing them by the tracks upon dew-wet leaves and grass. By taking to the stony defile where no dew fell, he hoped to elude them.

As they continued up the gorge it grew so narrow that they could not walk side by side. Presently, however, this narrow passage ended in a little opening, walled in on all sides by high, perpendicular rocks. There was no escape from this place but by the way they had entered it.

In looking about for some other outlet, or place of concealment, Antelope Abe discovered the mouth of a cavern leading straight down into the ground. It was shaped like a funnel, wide at the top and narrowing off as it went down until it was so small that a person larger than Antelope Abe could not pass through it. Beyond this narrow throat all was darkness, yet Abe believed from its appearance that it widened out again, and for a last resort, in case the Indians tracked them into the gorge, he resolved to descend into the hole, explore its advantages, if any, as a place of safety.

He had no difficulty in passing down the sloping, ragged sides of the opening, and by the sound of small stones that became displaced, and rolled down the funnel-throat, he knew there was a bottom to the pit within reach, and by putting the muzzle of his rifle down, he verified the fact.

Carefully letting himself down he soon found that he was standing on a firm rock, while a cavern of unknown dimensions spread out around him. But all was total darkness within, excepting a small circle of light around the entrance, and while our hero stood contemplating the strange place, even this bit of light was suddenly shut off by something appearing in the narrow funnel-throat above. But it lasted for only a moment, and to the surprise of the youth, he found it was occasioned by Ida following him into the cavern, and who now stood at his side.

Before he could speak she grasped him by the arm and said:

"Oh, dear Abe! there are a number of Indians coming up the defile!"

Abe was in the act of looking up when a shower of small stones came rattling down the funnel-throat. This was followed by a dull, crumbling noise, and a crash like a dull clap of thunder. Every ray of light was excluded from the passage, and a cloud of dirt and dust sent drifting through the cavern, almost suffocating the two young lovers. Stone after stone was rolled into the mouth of the pit till it was quite filled.

When all had become quiet above, our hero at-

tempted to remove the stone from the mass, but he could not move it. He tried to push it up, but the weight of the stones on the top held it there like a wedge—as firm as the walls around it.

Antelope Abe turned to his fair companion, and in a tone in which there was a tinge of despair, exclaimed:

"Ida, my darlin' girl, we're buried alive!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DOUBLE BLOW.

LET US now return to the lake and the beleaguered emigrants.

The night with them wore slowly away after Abe's and Roderic's departure, and Fred Hammond did not return; but Keen-knife continued his watch until morning, saying nothing to the emigrants of Fred's disappearance. However, when daylight dawned and Fred was found missing, inquiry was at once made about him.

"He gone. Go off in the night—don't know where," replied the Indian, and that was all they could get out of him.

But finally Mr. Hammond, taking the Indian to one side, questioned him closely, and learned that which caused him no little surprise.

When he returned to his tent, Mr. Hammond found his wife there alone, and seating himself, said:

"Mary, I'm afraid we have been terribly deceived in Fred, or else Keen-knife is not just right."

"Why so, Abram?" asked the wife.

"The Indian says he has seen Fred among the Sioux Indians in this country many times prior to the last six months."

"Great mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Hammond; "can it be possible that, when we sent him away to travel, he came West and leagued himself with the Indians?"

"I have suspected as much, Mary. But perhaps that little brass-bound trunk of his may give us some light on the matter. You know we've wondered what he kept guarded and locked so closely in it, and would never let a living soul look inside of it."

"Abram, I have often thought Fred acted rather curious since he returned home from his two years' traveling. He always evaded talking about the country in which he says he traveled."

"It must be, Mary, that he has been deceiving us all along, and instead of traveling in the South, as we supposed, he has been out here among the Indians. Keen-knife says he is a chief, and goes by the name of White Fox. About six months ago, he says, White Fox disappeared, and all supposed him dead."

"Six months ago!" exclaimed Mrs. Hammond. "That was just about the time Fred came home from his travels."

"Well, there is this about it, Mary we have done our duty by Fred, as a father and mother, but if he ignores our advice and training, we will have some consolation in knowing that he is not our child by birth."

"True, Abram, he is only a son by adoption, but when we adopted him and promised his dying mother that we would give him the name of Hammond, and know him only as a son, I knew the blood of the Georges was in his veins, and that no Christian influence could purify it. Still, let us hope, Abram, that Fred is not deceiving us, and will return and give a proper explanation of his disappearance. I know he loves Ida Clarkson, and perhaps his regard for her has something to do with his absence."

Mrs. Hammond was sorely grieved by what seemed a base desertion of their paternal love. They had educated him—given him every attention within their power, sent him abroad, and lavished unsparsingly upon him in the days of their prosperity. And now, in the moment of their adversity, he had deserted them. He was no relation to them; only a son by adoption. His mother had been a good and pious woman, but his father came of a

bad stock, and when the Hammonds adopted him, they had a fear that Fred would inherit the wickedness and bad disposition of his parent.

Still, Mr. Hammond entertained a hope that all would come right yet. He thought Keen-knife had acted rather strange since Ida Clarkson's capture, and a suspicion arose in his mind that the Friendly was not just right, and may have dealt foully with Fred during the night.

Mr. Clarkson was taken into Abram's confidence, and told all that Keen-knife had said about Fred. Mr. Hammond also spoke of his suspicions of the Indian, and so they resolved to keep an eye upon his movements.

The day wore slowly away. The emigrants watched in high hopes of seeing Antelope Abe and Roderic returning with Ida. But they were doomed to disappointment. Night fell, and the looked-for ones came not.

Keen-knife could not be induced to quit guard and seek rest and sleep, but took his post on the raft as night-watch, assisted by Tom Hammond.

Shortly after dark he wrapped his jaguar-skin around him, and, taking his rifle, he stepped upon the little raft—which had been instrumental in Ida's capture—and in a moment more he was moving toward the eastern shore of the lake.

"What are you going ashore for, Keen-knife?" Mr. Hammond called to the Friendly.

"To scont. See if bad Ingins are 'bout," replied Keen-knife, as he plied the pole quite vigorously.

"I tell you, friends, that youth will bear watching," said Hammond, turning to his friends.

And so they all thought. A new danger seemed gathering around them. Ida, Roderic and Antelope Abe were gone, and there was no telling whether they would ever return. Fred was missing, either through foul or treacherous means. John Hammond was wounded, and now Keen-knife, upon whom they had placed great reliance, was acting very strange.

But the Indian had been gone but a few minutes, when the emigrants became somewhat relieved by seeing him coming back. He was standing on the raft with his jaguar-skin drawn around his throat, and plying the pole leisurely.

He came alongside of the emigrants' raft, but he did not move from his own position. It was now quite dark, and seeing he did not move, Mr. Clarkson asked:

"Did you see any Indians about, Keen-knife?"

"No," returned the Indian, and to Mr. Clarkson his voice sounded a little harsh and strange.

The Indian still remained upon the small raft, keeping his eyes fixed upon the emigrants, or occasionally glancing uneasily toward the shore.

The emigrants kept moving about upon the raft; and finally, wondering why the Indian remained upon the little craft, Jennie Clarkson advanced near him, and asked:

"Keen-knife, why don't you come aboard this raft?"

The Indian made no reply, but, drawing a small lasso from under his jaguar-skin, threw it forward with such accuracy that its noose fell over the head and shoulders of the maiden, and pinioned her arms to her side. With a quick pull the Indian jerked her upon his own raft, and then, seizing the pole, drove his craft rapidly shoreward with the maiden a captive.

Jennie's screams aroused her friends, but they dared not fire upon the savage, for he screened his form with that of the maiden.

There were no means by which they could pursue the traitorous villain, and the half-distracted father was forced to stand and see his second daughter carried away into captivity.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HIDDEN CAVERN.

THE moment that Myrtle drove their canoe under the projecting rock, where they so mysteriously

disappeared from view of the pursuing savages. Roderic saw a section of the ledge directly over their heads *more upward*, revealing a round opening, leading up into the projecting rock, which he saw was hollow.

By command of Myrtle, he sprung from the canoe, up into the cavern, and was closely followed by the maiden. The little canoe was then drawn up into the cavern by a *third* person—the same who had opened the secret door—and the passage closed before the savages came up.

As he stood within this secret cavern, and gazed around him, Roderic saw that he and Myrtle were not alone. An aged negro and negress stood before him.

"This," said Myrtle, turning to the negro, a man of some fifty years, and whose head was white as snow, "is my friend, protector, and the master of this hidden cavern, Jupiter Keito, and this"—turning to the negress—"is his wife, Chloe."

"Lor' bress ye, Myrtle, child, who's ye been findin' dis time?" exclaimed the negress.

"Why, Aunt Chloe, I found this young man, wounded and almost dead."

"Bress ye's little heart, you is an angel, shuah."

Myrtle smiled, and turning to Roderic, said:

"I hope you will make yourself at ease here, Mr. Clarkson, if it is possible for you to do so."

"Is this your home, Myrtle?" asked Roderic.

"Yes," replied the maiden, in a tone of sadness.

"Then I will be content to remain here forever, if you are with me," returned Roderic, with a smile.

The maiden blushed and hung her head.

"Come into de parlor, children," said old Chloe, "and sit down. I jis' knows you's mos' awful tired."

They followed the negress to another apartment, that was comfortably furnished, in the backwoods view of comfort. There were some rude stools, a table, and a few pots and kettles.

Through two or three small rifts in the side of the rock overhanging the river, the sunshine poured into the apartment, flooding it with light. And right here I will say, that from one of these small windows old Jupiter had fired the shot which saved Myrtle from the power of the Indian that had leaped into the canoe the night before.

Roderic seated himself and entered into conversation with Jupiter, while Myrtle, assisted by old Chloe, set to work to prepare herself and protege some breakfast.

The youth found the old darky was possessed of much intelligence, and soon gained an authentic history of his past life.

It seemed that Jupiter and his wife had been slaves in Kentucky, and had suffered greatly at the hands of a heartless master. An enemy of this master put it into old Jupiter's head to run off, and gave him three hundred dollars to procure an outfit. To evade capture and punishment, he shaped his course for the West, where he became a successful hunter and trapper.

He had lived some five years in the cavern where we now find him, and though the mechanical precision with which the stone barred the mouth of the street, it had never been discovered by an enemy. This entrance over the water, however, the negro had torn out himself, through the floor of the cavern, when he first discovered the cave by a passage far back among the bluffs. This passage he blocked up, and used only when high waters prevented an exit through the floor of the cavern over the river.

After a sumptuous breakfast of such meats and fruits as the country afforded, Roderic and Myrtle found themselves alone, the old black folks having retired to another apartment.

"How do you like my home, Roderic?" asked Myrtle, with child-like familiarity.

"It has its charms, I must admit; but I know you were not born and bred here, Myrtle. And I can not

believe one so young, fair and intelligent as you, can be entirely happy here."

"But, Roderic, it is all the home I have, and these two old colored people are all that I have that care for me."

"Nay, nay, Myrtle!" exclaimed Roderic. "I care for you! I love you, Myrtle, with all my heart—I loved you from the moment I first met you on the prairie, near the lake, and it would be a joy forever to know that my love was returned by you."

"Roderic, it is. I love you," replied Myrtle, with tearful eyes and quivering lips.

"Heaven be thanked! Then you will go with me to the settlement, and become my wife, will you not, dear Myrtle?"

"Oh, Roderic! perhaps if you knew something of my past life, you would not ask me to be your wife."

"And if I do not object to your past life, which I know has been one of persecutions, innocence and purity, then will you promise to be my wife, some day?"

Myrtle hung her head and replied in the affirmative, and, after a few minutes of silent love communion, she narrated the story of her past life. It was long and sad, and, as incident is crowding us, we will narrate it to the reader in substance.

Her parents both died when she was quite young, and then she was adopted into the family of her mother's sister, Martha Bodsford, a widow with two children of her own, both boys, grown to manhood. Shortly after her adoption into the Bodsford family, they all moved to the great West. Here the two sons of the widow became leagued with the Indians and notorious outlaws.

To the reader they are known as Tim Bodsford and Death-Trail.

The widow was a kind Christian mother, and tried every means within her power to induce her boys to lead a Christian life, but all in vain.

When Myrtle reached the age of eighteen, few boys of her years on the border, Antelope Abe excepted, could equal her in wood or watercraft, or in trailing a deer, or in the use of the rifle.

One day, while hunting in the woods, near the widow's hut, she met a young man who introduced himself as Guy Parkerson, and whom she conducted to the cabin, where he was treated with much hospitable kindness.

Guy Parkerson came often after this to the cabin of the Bodsfords, and finally he made known the object of his visits by proposin' for the hand of Myrtle. His love not being returned, he was rejected.

Through the widow Bodsford, Myrtle subsequently learned that Guy Parkerson was none other than the renegade chief, White Fox. And after his rejection by Myrtle, he offered the outlaw brothers a small fortune, if they would compel Myrtle to marry him.

This offer the villains accepted, but Myrtle learned of their nefarious bargain, and fled into the woods, where she remained concealed for a long time. Her aunt Martha carried her provisions and clothing when her sons were away. But at last, the outlaws got upon her track, by wat ching' her mother, and the maiden was compelled to flee. In her flight she came across Jupiter Keito, who took her to his hidden home, where she had remained in perfect security ever since. But every few days she left the cavern, and managed to leave for or receive a note from her aunt Martha, by placing a note at an appointed place, which was changed every few days.

By this means, Myrtle was kept posted as to the movements of White Fox and the outlaw brothers. The latter believed that Antelope Abe had spirited Myrtle away, and swore a terrible vengeance upon him.

Time passed on, and finally the report came that White Fox had mysteriously disappeared, and it was believed he was killed; and so Myrtle had that

much less to fear. Still, she would never venture back to the cabin of the Bodsfords, who were now making a business of kidnapping women from the emigrant trains and selling them to the Indians. She remained with the black hunter and his wife, and assisted him about his traps, and was company for old Chloe when Jupiter went to the settlement for supplies.

When Roderic had listened to this tale of trials and wrongs, he asked:

"How did you learn, Myrtle, that the families encamped at the lake were those of Enoch Clarkson and Abraham Hammond? You know you mentioned their names the night you warned me of their being in danger."

"I learned the names through Aunt Martha. Tim Bodsford had found a paper near a place called the Wolf's Mouth, and supposed Antelope Abe had lost it. It was written by a Mr. Dorian to Enoch Clarkson and Abraham Hammond and directed to the care of Antelope Abe, whom Mr. Dorian was sending to guide them to the settlement."

When Myrtle had concluded, Roderic took her little brown hand in his, and said:

"Myrtle, if you have been unfortunate and persecuted, it is a just reason that I should love you all the more, and ask that you place your future life in my care."

"Roderic," replied Myrtle, "we have known each other but a short time, and perhaps when you have had time for reflection, you will change your mind."

"Never, Myrtle! never!"

"I hope it will prove so, Roderic."

"Myrtle, my love will never change. Besides, you will be in great danger again here, for White Fox has turned up alive, and no doubt as bad as ever."

"Yes, I knew he was about, for I met Guy Parkerson the night I first met you."

"Met Guy Parkerson—White Fox!" exclaimed Roderic, as a dark suspicion flashed into his mind; "where did you meet him, Myrtle?"

"On guard at your camp, and when he saw me he turned and fled like a coward!"

"Then, by Heavens!" cried Roderic, "Guy Parkerson, White Fox and Fred Hammond are one and the same person!"

CHAPTER XVI.

A JOYOUS MEETING.

"YES, I have suspected as much already," repeated Roderic. "Fred Hammond is White Fox. I pity his poor old father and mother, who supposed he was away gaining knowledge by travel in the Southern States, when he was out here leagued with Satan and the Indians!"

"Is he still at the lake?" inquired Myrtle.

"He was there when we left, but I have reason to believe he has left since. Antelope Abe and I saw White Fox, and when he spoke to his savages I would have sworn it was Fred's voice."

"Then I will keep close to the cabin, for he is to be feared. The outlaws know I am about, and only last night pursued me on the river."

"You must go away from here with me, Myrtle—I will not leave without you."

"It will be with much regret that I leave old Jupiter and Chloe. They have been so kind to me. Perhaps I can induce them to go to the settlement, too. They have lived here over five years, and have become greatly attached to the place."

"This is a wonderful cavern, Myrtle. Does it extend back into the bluffs?"

"Yes; the hills are honeycombed with caverns. Wouldn't you like a walk through them, Roderic?"

"Yes, with you, Myrtle," Roderic returned.

Turning, she called Jupiter to show them through the cavern.

The old negro procured a lamp and lit it. He first conducted Roderic to the entrance and showed him the manner of opening it. A huge block of stone,

fitting the opening closely, was raised and lowered by a lever power, and braced so that no human power could force it upward from below.

From the opening they turned away and started off through the cavern. Myrtle walked by Roderic's side, her sweet young face aglow with inward happiness.

They wandered from chamber to chamber, as perhaps did ancient feet in countless ages gone by: and presently they came to where the passage became low and narrow, and was finally terminated by the appearance of a large rock before them that was braced there with a bar of wood.

Jupiter handed the light to Myrtle, and removing the brace, he applied his massive shoulder to the rock, which he succeeded in rolling into a niche in the wall.

The passage was now opened, and with some difficulty they crept through it and found themselves in a spacious chamber with a stalactited dome, fluted walls and grim stalagmites rising upward from the ground like massive pillars on every side.

Just then a low cry, as if from human lips echoed through the grim old vault.

"Golly Cæsars!" exclaimed Jupiter, "dar's sumthin' in dis cave!"

They listened. The quick tread of feet was heard approaching, and the next moment two figures emerged from the darkness into the glare of the lamplight.

A cry of surprise and joy burst from Roderic's lips; the two persons before them were Antelope Abe and his sister Ida!

"Saved, Ida! saved!" cried Abe, as he recognized the group.

"Oh, brother Roderic!" cried Ida, as she sprung forward and clasped her brother about the neck, "it is you—you and Myrtle! Oh, I am so glad! We thought that we were buried alive, and that you were dead!"

"How long have you been in here, sister?"

"Forty years, Roderic," returned Ida. "Am I not gray-headed?" and she laughed and wept with joy. "It seems so very, very long."

"We have been here since shortly after sunrise," said Antelope Abe, and then he narrated the story of their escape from the island, and their subsequently being entrapped into the cavern which they supposed had no other outlet than the one through which they had entered.

The exploration of the cavern at once ended, and the negro led the little party of adventurers back to "de parlor," where an hour was passed in explanations and recounting adventures.

Love and happiness reigned supreme. Ida and Myrtle were brimming full of mirth and joy, and their lovers were equally as exuberant in spirit.

The joy of this meeting lasted for some time, then followed the arrangements for returning to the lake. This would have to be accomplished under cover of night.

The subject of the emigrants' stolen horses finally came up, whereupon Myrtle gave the joyful information of the whereabouts of the horses. Her aunt Martha had told her that the outlaw brothers had horses in their possession, and that they were concealed in a dense thicket back of their hut.

The recovery of the animals was a most essential object, not only to facilitate the return to the lake, but to hasten forward the journey of the emigrants. So, as soon as night fell, Antelope Abe, accompanied by Roderic and old Jupiter, set off for the hut of the outlaws.

The girls remained with old Chloe at the secret cavern, and after many weary, weary hours of waiting and watching, the men returned with the cheering news that the horses had all been recovered—even Antelope Abe's favorite horse, which he had lost the day of his adventure at the Wolf's Mouth.

Preparations were at once made for departure. Myrtle was going with them, and now came the part-

ing with old Jupiter and Chloe, who could not be induced to leave their home in the rock overhanging the river. They wept bitterly when she bid them good-by, and thanked them kindly for the home they had given her in the darkest hour of her life.

"If ever you should meet aunt Martha Bodsford, Jupiter," Myrtle said, "tell her where I am gone, and that I shall never forget to pray for her."

Jupiter promised to comply with her request, then the mouth of the cavern was opened, and two canoes dropped into the river beneath, in which the party at once embarked for the south shore.

They landed near where they had left the horses, and in a few minutes they were all mounted and moving away southward toward Silver Basin, under the guidance of Antelope Abe.

CHAPTER XVII.

JENNIE IS RESCUED.

THERE was great excitement on the raft at Silver Basin over the capture of Jennie Clarkson. The half-distracted father uttered fearful maledictions against the Indian, and it was all his friends could do to restrain him from swimming ashore in pursuit of the savage abductor.

This act convinced the emigrants that Keen-knife had been instrumental in the capture of Ida and in spiriting Fred Hammond away.

While they stood upon the raft pouring censure upon their own heads for permitting themselves to be deceived, they were startled by the crack of a rifle and a savage death-wail on the east shore of the lake. This was followed by a scream which they knew to be Jennie's.

The darkness prevented them from seeing what was going on. Enoch Clarkson groaned in spirit.

A silence now ensued, but it was soon broken by the rippling waters chafing the sides of the raft. Every eye was fixed on the surrounding waters, and through the gloom a small raft suddenly came to view. It was approaching from the east shore.

"Halt!" cried Enoch Clarkson; "who comes there?"

"It is I, father—Keen-knife and I."

It was the voice of Jennie, and her words filled every one on the raft with surprise and astonishment, and before they had recovered their composure the little raft came alongside of the large one, and Jennie sprung into the arms of her father.

"What is the meaning of all this?" cried the father, as he saw Keen-knife follow Jennie from the small raft.

"Father," cried Jennie, "you have wronged Keen-knife again. It was a bad Indian who captured me. Keen-knife rescued me."

"How is that?" the father cried; "the Indian was wrapped in Keen-knife's jaguar-skin."

"Yes, father; when Keen-knife went ashore, he says he took off his jaguar-skin and laid it in the grass. The bad Indian must have seen him, and when Keen-knife went away he took it, and putting it on, came over here to pass himself off as the Friendly. Keen-knife told me this, and I know it is true, father, for it was he who slew the Indian and saved me."

"By heavens!" exclaimed Clarkson, "I see through it all! I thought the Indian's voice sounded a little harsh and strange. But it was an Indian, and the Friendly's spotted robe, and to me all Indians look alike, and so I was sure it was Keen-knife. But if I mistrust you again, Keen-knife, I hope somebody will shoot me."

Keen-knife laughed, in a low, pleasant manner, and turned away.

This explanation made matters somewhat quieter on board the raft. And the Indian was permitted to continue on duty, without being suspected or watched.

The night passed quietly away, and just as the sun came up, Keen-knife descried a party of horsemen approaching from the north. With the assistance of his spy-glass, Mr. Clarkson was enabled

to see that it was Antelope Abe and Roderic, returning, with not only his daring little Ida, but their horses and a strange young female. But Fred Hammond was not among them.

Shout upon shout went up from the raft and was answered back from the approaching party that soon drew rein on the bank of the lake.

The raft was at once poled over to the shore, when a joyous meeting took place between Ida and her friends.

Myrtle was introduced to the company, and when the part she had taken in the interest of the emigrants became known, blessings were poured upon her head. And all were pleased when it was announced that she was going to accompany them to the settlement.

Myrtle's story in regard to Fred Hammond's treachery confirmed that of Keen-knife.

Abram Hammond then made it openly known that Fred was *not* his son, and spoke of the secret of the brass-bound trunk. The secret of the hand of fire which had so mystified some of our friends, was explained by Myrtle. It was a signal-board covered with phosphorus, and used by the outlaw brothers in directing the movements of their allies in the darkness.

Antelope Abe reported that the Indians had withdrawn from the vicinity of the lake, and urged upon the emigrants to make all haste in continuing their journey. He feared the next demonstration of the savages would be made in force, without regard to consequences, or cost of life.

So preparations were at once made for leaving Silver Basin.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT LAST.

THE sun was dropping slowly westward on its diurnal course, yet it found our little band of emigrants, under the guidance of Antelope Abe, several miles from Silver Basin.

Their course lay due westward over an unbroken waste of prairie, and along a high and level divide from which the plain swept away toward the Checaque river on the right, and the Des Moines on the left.

The keen eyes of the young hunter-guide roamed incessantly over the plain on all sides as he rode forward at the head of the train.

Keen-knife was constantly on the alert in the rear of the train, and so no fears of a surprise were entertained by the emigrants.

Suddenly, however, in the midst of their quiet journeying, Antelope Abe wheeled his horse about and shouted:

"Ingins! A score of mounted devils are comin' down upon us! Let us prepare to meet 'em. Git every rifle ready and we'll give 'em particular thunder!"

The greatest excitement prevailed, but the young guide managed to get the teams secured against a stampede, and every man and woman able to handle a rifle was placed in position behind the wagons, ready to receive the Indians.

As the savages approached, Antelope Abe saw that they were led by the chief, White Fox, but he said nothing of his discovery to the emigrants.

Waiting until the yelling demons had come within close range, the young guide gave the order to fire.

Nearly a dozen rifles cracked as one, and half a dozen Indian ponies were made riderless. White Fox was among the fallen.

With a yell of dismay, the remaining savages wheeled their animals and fled.

A shout of triumph burst from the lips of the emigrants that increased the fears and terrors of the flying red-skins, who, in a few minutes, were miles away.

Antelope Abe and Keen-knife went to see about the fallen, and in a few minutes returned, bearing between them the form of White Fox. They laid

him upon a blanket near the wagons, and then Antelope Abe said:

"That is White Fox, the Sioux chief, and he is dyin'."

"Yes," responded the chief, "I am White Fox—better known to you all as Fred Hammond."

"Great heaven! Fred, is this true?" cried Abram Hammond, dropping on his knees by the prostrate form.

"Yes, father, it is. I have deceived you. I am an outlaw and a renegade chief, but I am about—nay, I have received the penalty of my crime. I am dying. It was not the intention to harm any of you. We merely intended to carry off the girls. We hoped to surprise you and thus avoid bloodshed on either side. But in case I fell, the Indians were to make no further attempt to capture the girls. The two years I was away from home I spent mostly among the Indians, and became a noted chief. I would never have rejoined them but for one thing. I loved Ida Clarkson, and my love was rejected. I had a rival, and attempting to slay him, I shot John Hammond through mistake."

A cry of surprise burst from every lip.

"In a moment of jealous rage," continued the dying man, "I resolved to rejoin the Indians—carry Ida away and compel her to be my wife. I essayed to place the camp in the power of the Indians who were already besieging it. The night I left the camp, I went to meet the savages. It was then that I arranged for the capture of the camp, though I gave orders, as their chief, that none of you should be slain, or retained in captivity, excepting Jennie and Ida. Three blazing arrows shot up into the air were to be the signal for the attack, but I was watched by some one and defeated in giving the signal. I am certain it was Antelope Abe. And I know that the little brass-bound trunk of mine has caused you to wonder many times what its contents were. It contained the disguise which I now have on."

"This is all my story. I am glad that I am not your son, Abram and Mary Hammond, for I am unworthy of the name. Ask all whom I have wronged to forgive me, if they can. I see many persons standing around me, but they are so far away and it is growing so dark, that I cannot distinguish their faces, and—"

Here his voice fell into an incoherent muttering, which lasted several minutes; then he fell into a deep slumber, from which he never awoke.

For several minutes the little party stood with bowed heads around the motionless form, wrapt in that awful silence which the presence of death inspires.

Finally, Mr. Hammond said, in a solemn, half-choked voice:

"He is dead!"

The next half-hour was one of great solemnity. No one thought of the dead man's crimes. In their hearts, they forgave him for the wrongs he had done them, and they thought of him only as the dead.

A grave was hollowed out on the plain, and the body, wrapped in a blanket, was placed in it, and covered from the view of the world forever.

The train now moved on, but went into camp for the night. The following morning they resumed their journey, and after two days' traveling, reached their destination without further trouble from the Indians. And here a new life began to the characters of our story, and I have but little more to add.

Mr. Clarkson offered to pay Antelope Abe for his invaluable services, as guide, but he refused it, saying:

"Thar's but one thing I ask in lieu of my services, Mr. Clarkson, and that is the hand of your daughter Ida."

Enoch Clarkson was startled with surprise. For a moment he seemed dumfounded; then, as a smile swept over his face, he said:

"Well, well, young man, you surprise me. You have asked me for the brightest treasure I possess. But you are worthy of any woman's love, and if you and Ida can make it all right, why—why, take her, and may God bless you both."

Some three years later, the marriage of Abram Smollet, or Antelope Abe, and Ida Clarkson was consummated at the house of the bride's father.

At that time John Hammond and Jenny Clarkson, and Roderic and Myrtle had been married over a year.

Antelope Abe finally became a popular man—as he had been a boy—in the great West, and his bright little Ida made him a dutiful wife and gentle mother.

Keen-knife remained with his boyhood friend, and grew old in the service of the whites.

Myrtle made Roderic a noble wife, and she never gave him cause to regret the hour she came to him on the prairie near the lake, "like the vision of a dream."

She never heard more of the outlaw brothers and their poor old mother. A military post had been established at the juncture of the Raccoon and Des Moines rivers, and all the outlaws and robbers were driven to some other quarter.

Old Jupiter and Chloe, finally tiring of their cavern home, came to the settlement and took up their residence.

And now what more need I say? With reluctance, I must bid adieu to the characters whom I have learned to love during the short time we have been together. I sincerely hope my readers and charitable critics have found an interest in the story sufficient to induce them to follow it to

THE END.

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